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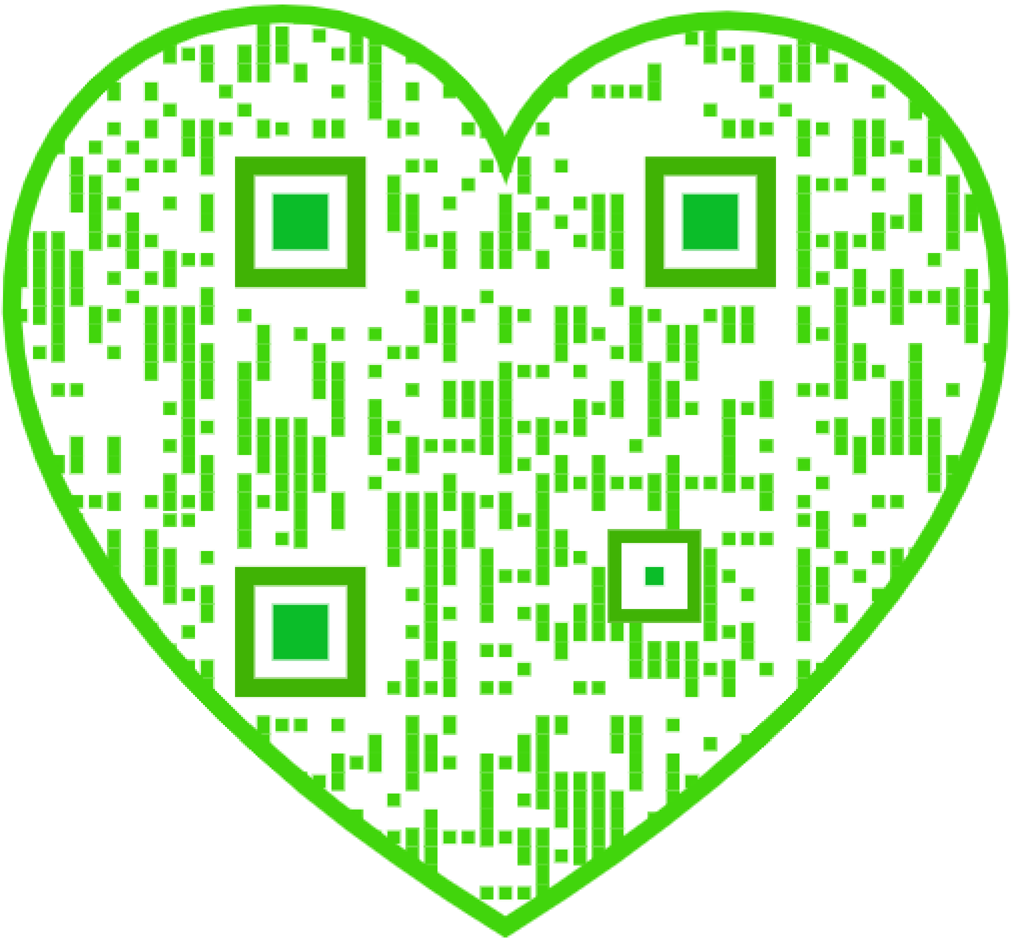

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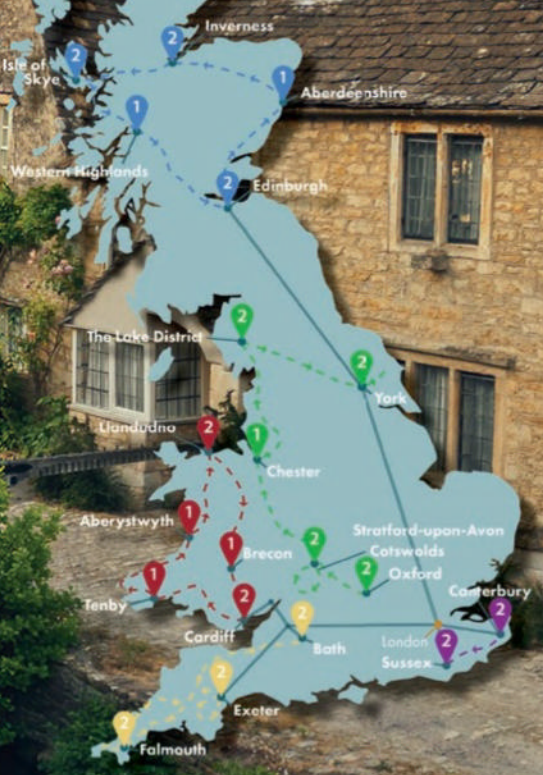
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VE DAY 80
Homes of the Brave

Cover image: The pretty town of Leek in Staffordshire © Jonathan Statham/Alamy

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Castle Fraser

EDITOR'S LETTER

Here at *BRITAIN* we love to champion unsung regions, as well as destinations that are firmly on the tourist trail. This issue, we visit Staffordshire, the historic home of the Potteries at the heart of England, whose timeless towns and picturesque landscapes are well worth straying off the beaten track for (*p14*). Our interviewee this issue, the acclaimed actress Helen Mirren, also favours authentic destinations, naming unpretentious Essex and down-to-earth Yorkshire as places she can "get on with life" (*p33*).

Also this issue, we hold up a mirror to the beauty secrets of kings and queens through the ages, whose dubious beautifying treatments, from poisonous makeup to white-wine baths, had far from the intended effect (*p25*). We cherry-pick the best Scottish castle stays – complete with your own bagpiper, if you so wish (*p65*). And our writer is the first to try the new 'below stairs' experience at Blenheim Palace – read all about it on *p71*.

And don't miss our new back-page series, in which we meet the owners of historic houses and discover the challenges and the joys of living in a landmark – starting with the dramatic experience of Lullingstone Castle's Tom Hart Dyke (*p82*). Enjoy the issue!

Natasha

Natasha Foges, Editor

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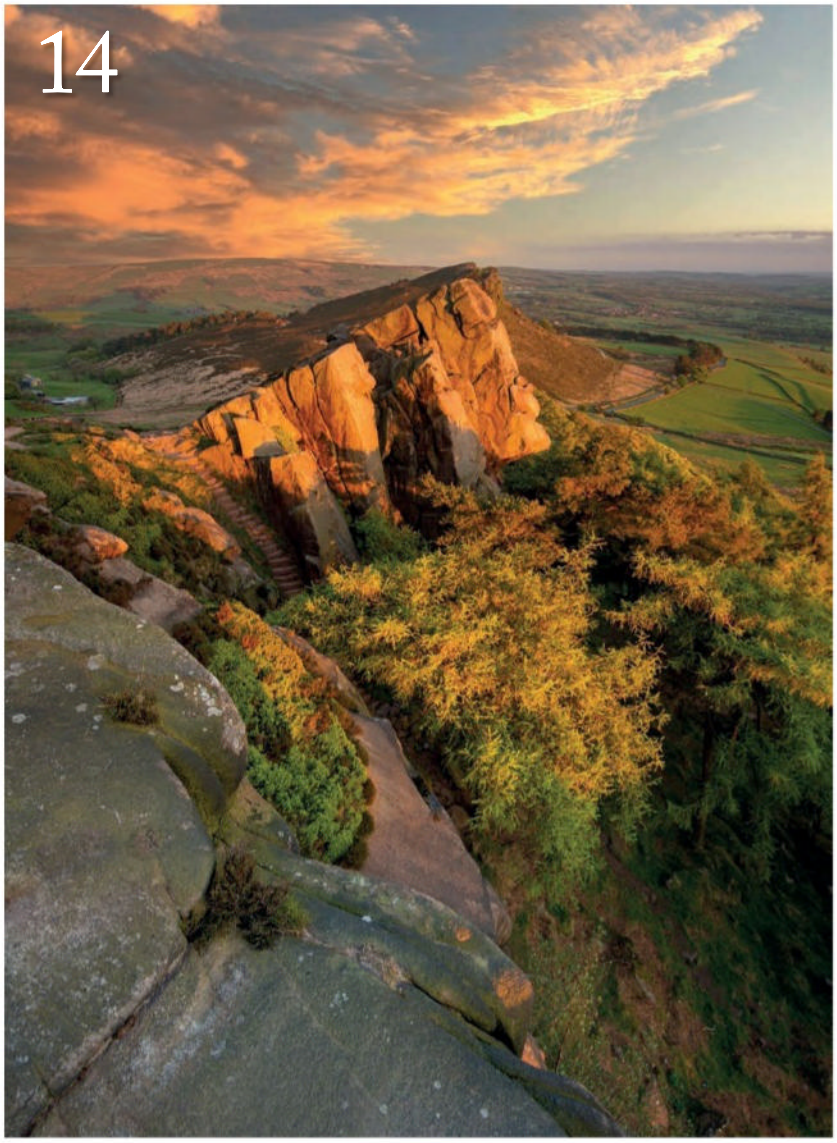

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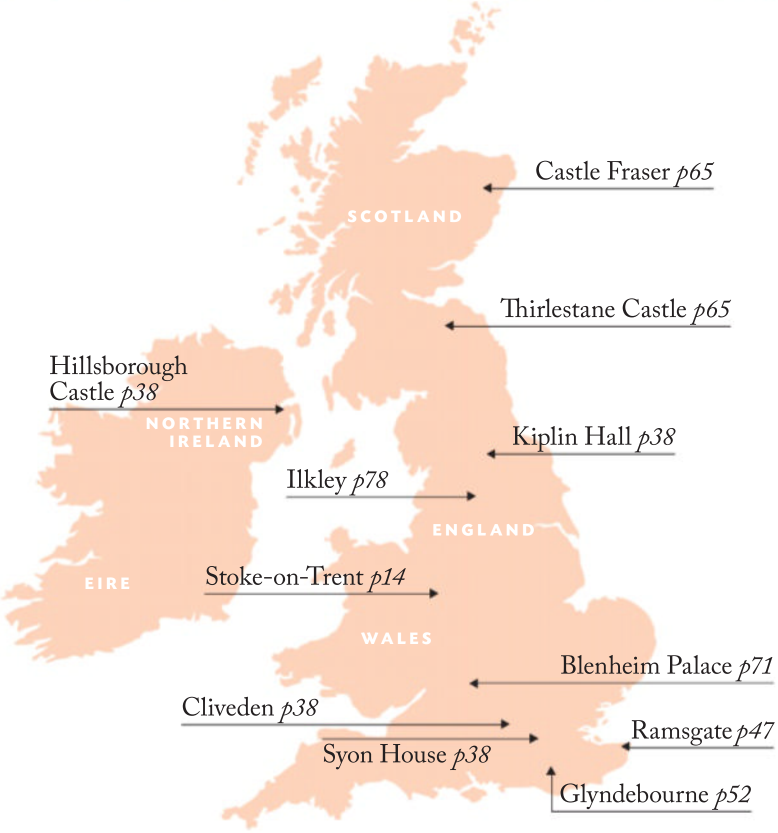
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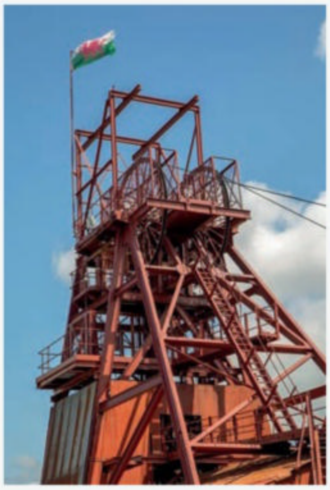
YOUR LETTERS

Write to us with your thoughts on the magazine and memories of Britain

STAR LETTER A MINER'S LIFE

As the great-granddaughter of a Welsh coal miner, I was delighted to read the Empire of Iron article by Luke Waterson [Vol 93 Issue 1]. While researching my family history, I discovered that from 1880 through to late 1887 my great-grandfather worked at the Ocean Deep Navigation Colliery (a.k.a. Deep Navigation Colliery) in Treharris. Given that Treharris is a mere 41km south-west of the big pit, the pictures of the ironworks and the cottages at Blaenavon provided me with a small snapshot of what life was like back then. Although I believe that in my great-grandparents' case, their accommodation during those early years would have been far more spartan. I cannot even begin to imagine the harsh working conditions those early miners endured. They certainly were made of stronger stuff than most of us.



In November 1887, my great-grandparents packed up their belongings and with their four young children (my grandfather being the youngest at the time) emigrated to Canada where they became farmers on the Canadian prairie and had another five children.

Luke's article allowed me to further connect with my Welsh roots and instilled a sense of pride in the sacrifices and hardships made by those before me.

Shirley Waldon, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

POEMS OF
LONDON

Our star letter wins a copy of *Poems of London*, edited by Jane McMorland Hunter (published by Batsford, £12.99; *batsfordbooks.com*). From cockney songs and jellied eels to wholesome, rainy summers, this delightful pocket anthology captures the heart and spirit of London life.

QUICK QUIZ

Test your knowledge with our five-minute quiz! The answers can all be found in this issue of *BRITAIN* (or find the answers below).

1. In which craft, associated with Staffordshire, would you throw, fire and glaze?
2. In which English county can you find a house once owned by an ancestor of George Washington?
    - a) Northamptonshire
    - b) Yorkshire
    - c) Cornwall
3. Name the UK's only non-royal, non-episcopal palace.

ANSWERS: 1. Pottery **2.** a) Northamptonshire **3.** Blenheim

DARTMOOR TO DECO

The March 2025 issue of *Britain* Magazine [Vol 93 Issue 1] hit so many hot buttons, both as fond remembrances and places to put on the to-do list.

Dartmoor – so enjoyed the area. Actually loved being stopped in our car to allow for the passage of wild horses. Great base for exploring Dartmoor, but also the nearby coast, Lyme Regis, Jurassic Coast, Dartmouth, etc. I forget the name of the town, but we bought a wonderful painting from the village that seems to showcase artists and artisans.

Great base for day tours: Bovey Castle, built by the former head of British Rail. Very comfortable rooms; beautifully appointed public rooms; lovely grounds for country pleasures (golf; walks...) Wonderful on-site restaurants, both upmarket and more casual. Staff were wonderful about local guidance. This was another great example of one of life's true pleasures: having a drink in a historic, atmospheric country-house bar. And yes, I can imagine the glamorous house parties.

Deco hotels – really – is there anything more swank than staying at one of the art deco hotels mentioned in the article? If you can't afford a stay, at least do tea time. Thanks for a great issue.

Jan Owens, Wisconsin, USA

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THE BULLETIN

Lives & loves at Sissinghurst, Jane Austen on stage, and poppies return to the Tower

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EXHIBITION

Portrait of an author

A new exhibition at Vita Sackville-West's former home Sissinghurst in Kent will take visitors into the world of her trailblazing writing, exploring women's lives, loves and identities. *Between the Covers with Vita: The Life and Literature of Vita Sackville-West* is on display until 7 September at the home she shared with her husband Harold Nicolson. Shining a spotlight on Vita's writing through ten of her works, the exhibition explores the female lovers and family members that influenced her writing. Some of the author's personal belongings will be on display, including a notebook with her handwritten notes inside, and the original printing press from Hogarth Press, a publishing company owned by Virginia and Leonard Woolf, which printed many of Vita's novels.

nationaltrust.org.uk

VITA
MARCH 6th
1911

THEATRE

A party at Pemberley

With silly dancing, outrageous humour and just the right amount of chaos, London's newest Jane Austen theatre show is the perfect showcase for the author's timeless wit and brilliance. Playing at The Vaults in London's Waterloo until mid-May, and coinciding with Austen's 250th anniversary this year, *Plied and Prejudice* is an immersive comedy retelling of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. With just five actors playing all 20 characters, hilarious scenes, flowing cocktails (Austen-themed of course), as well as some humour that would certainly make Jane blush, the show is a lesson in Jane's magic. Hardcore Austen fans will be delighted at this loyal interpretation of her most beloved work.

thevaults.london/plied-and-prejudice

FOOD & DRINK

A rum fellow

William Shakespeare's plays are awash with references to beer, wine and ale, so the Bard would surely have approved of the founding of the Shakespeare Distillery in his hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon – indeed, in the former home of Shakespeare's own daughter. The historic building on Stratford's High Street was once home to Judith Shakespeare and her husband, Thomas Quiney. The distillery has become known for its signature Stratford Dry Gin and Jester Rum, and in addition to gin tastings and cocktail masterclasses, you can now book rum-tasting experiences. Visitors will learn how the spirits are made and taste at least three of the distillery's own rums, all while soaking up the atmosphere of the building's remarkable Shakespearean history.

shakespearedistillery.com

OPENING

We will remember them

The Tower of London is set to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War with the return of its popular ceramic poppies installation in the moat of the historic fortress. Opening on 6 May and running until November, the display will use 30,000 of the poppies from 2014's *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* display, which marked the centenary of the end of the First World War, on loan from the Imperial War Museum's collection.

This year's installation will form a different display, resembling a 'wound' at the heart of the tower, with poppies pouring across the lawn overlooked by the White Tower. The tower itself was bombed during the Blitz, and marking this anniversary is very important to its community, some of whom are veterans themselves.

hrp.org.uk

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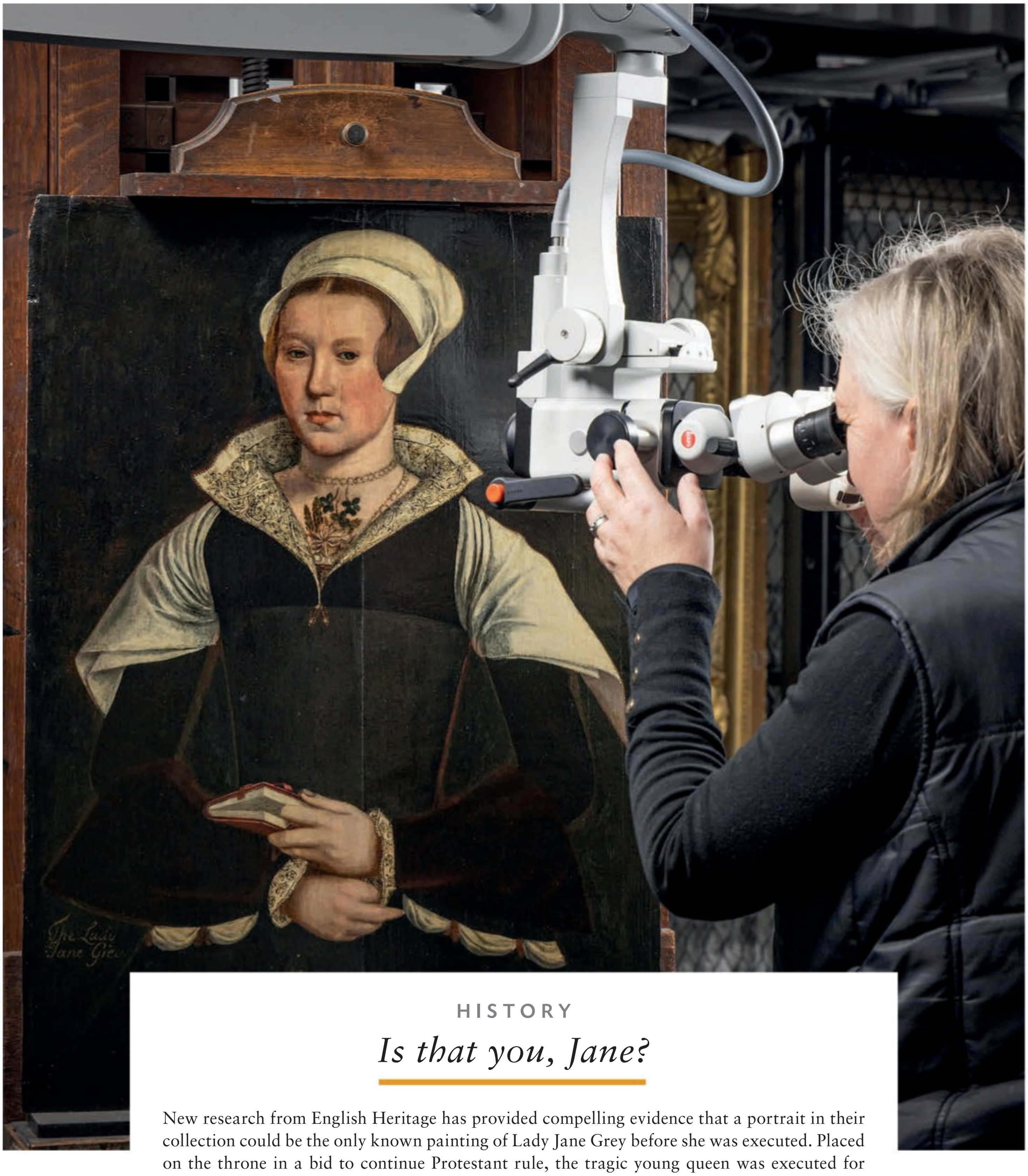

HISTORY

Is that you, Jane?

New research from English Heritage has provided compelling evidence that a portrait in their collection could be the only known painting of Lady Jane Grey before she was executed. Placed on the throne in a bid to continue Protestant rule, the tragic young queen was executed for treason after only nine days on the throne, aged just 17 years old.

The cutting-edge new research, which included dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) and infrared reflectography to reveal what lies beneath the surface of the painting, uncovered new evidence pointing in favour of a royal identity. One striking change is in Jane's eyes, which were originally positioned looking past the viewer to the sitter's left. It appears that the eyes, mouth and ears were deliberately scratched at some point in the painting's lifetime: most likely an anti-Protestant statement. On loan from a private collection, the painting is now on display at Wrest Park in Bedfordshire.
english-heritage.org.uk

This tart can be served either hot, warm or at room temperature

RECIPE

Apple, Cheese & Honey Tart

Presenter and broadcaster Kate Humble is known for her love of the countryside, so it's little surprise that rural traditions and seasonal cooking are at the heart of her latest book, *Home Made* (published by Gaia, £26; *octopusbooks.co.uk*). A collection of simple and sustainable recipes from farm to table, the book includes this tart, which as Kate says, "shamelessly incorporates some of my favourite things into one dish." Because it's neither completely sweet nor completely savoury, the tart can be eaten in any way you like, at the beginning of a meal as a starter, at the end as a sort of pudding and cheese combined, or as a meal all of its own with a salad.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

- *1 sheet of ready-rolled puff pastry*
- *100g (3½oz) hard cheese, such as Cheddar, grated*
- *2 small eating apples, quartered, cored and finely sliced*
- *1 tablespoon honey*
- *50g (1¾oz) walnuts, crumbled*
- *leaves from 4 thyme sprigs*
- *sea salt and freshly ground black pepper*

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 200°C (400°F), Gas Mark 6.

Unroll the puff-pastry sheet and place onto a baking tray. Sprinkle the cheese over the pastry, leaving a 1cm (½ inch) margin all the way round the pastry. Top with the apples, arranging them in a nice pattern on top of the cheese.

Put the honey into a small bowl, add a tiny bit of hot water and mix into the honey to loosen it to a brushable consistency. Brush the apples with the honey. Sprinkle over the walnuts and season with a little salt and pepper.

Place in the oven and bake for 20 minutes, or until golden all over. Remove from the oven and scatter the thyme leaves across the top. Leave until cool enough to handle, then cut into slices.

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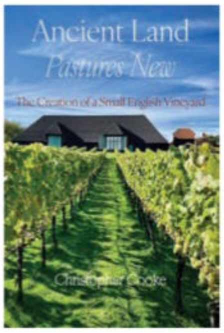
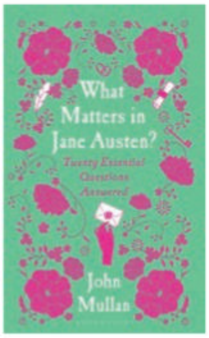
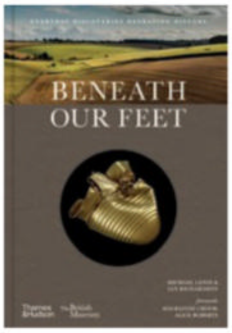


Ancient Land, Pastures New: The Creation of a Small English Vineyard by Christopher Cooke (£17.50). Blending personal diary entries with viticultural insights, Cooke sheds light on the gritty process of wine production. His tale is one of persistence, partnership and the ambition to cultivate success..


What Matters in Jane Austen?
Twenty Essential Questions Answered
John Mullan

What Matters in Jane Austen? by John Mullan (Bloomsbury, £14.99). Through 20 essential questions, Austen expert Mullan explores the rituals and conventions of Jane's world, revealing her technical virtuosity and sheer daring as a novelist.



Beneath our Feet by Michael Lewis, Ian Richardson & Mackenzie Crook (Thames & Hudson, £30). A celebration of civilian finds, recovered by chance or by walkers, mudlarks and metal detectorists scouring the country, and the groundbreaking work of the British Museum's Portable Antiquities Scheme.

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TOP *of the* POTS

North Staffordshire has a proud history of pottery, and Stoke, the historic capital of the Potteries, celebrates its centenary as a city this year. But as our writer discovers, it's not all pots and plates

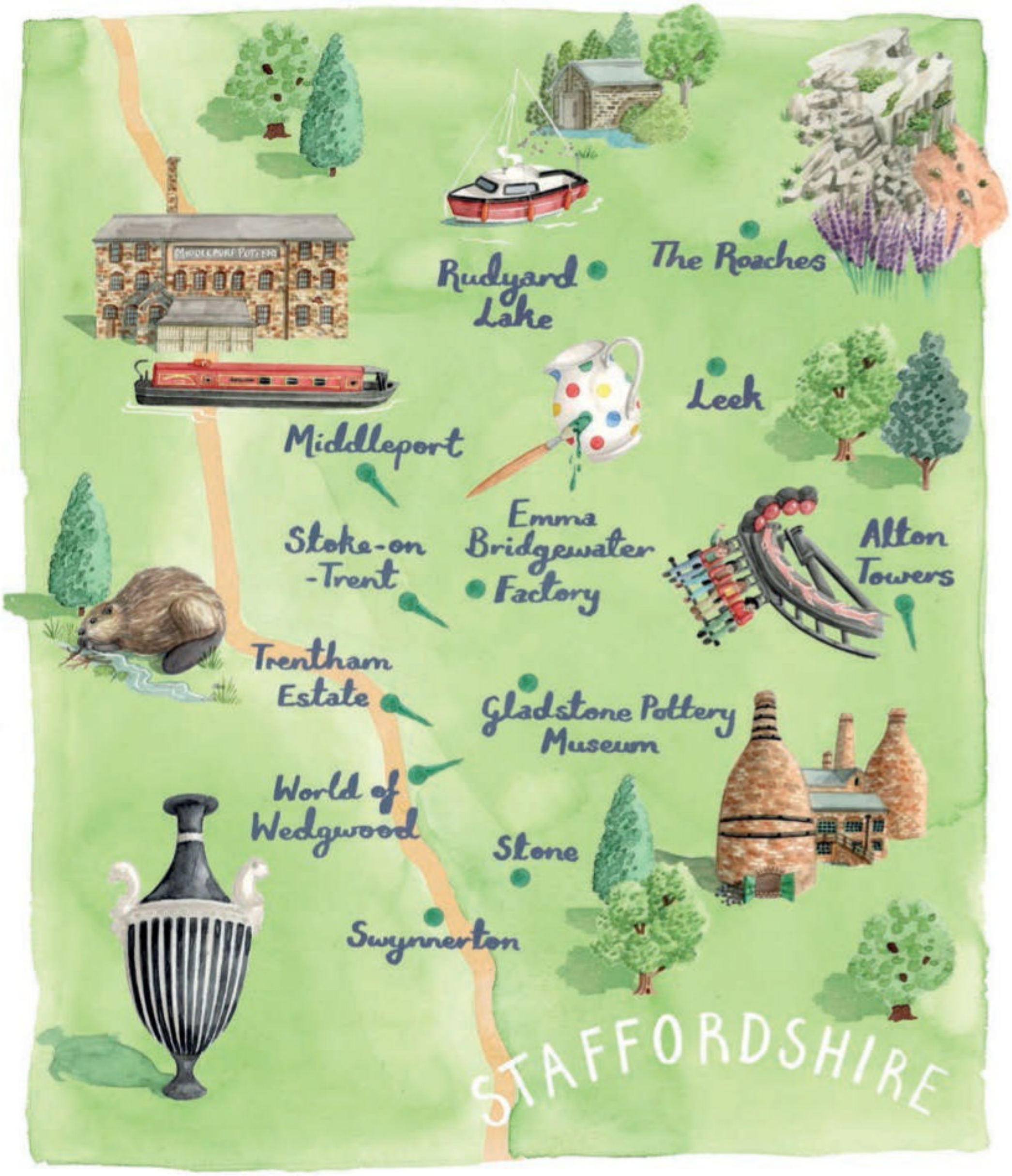
WORDS **CAROLINE BUTTERWICK**

There's a friendly joke that you can tell someone is from Stoke-on-Trent if they lift up plates to check whether the stamp on the base says it was made in the city, followed by a shake of the head if it wasn't. Located in the heart of England, in the county of Staffordshire – which is sometimes referred to as 'the creative county' – Stoke-on-Trent and the surrounding area is a place of pot banks, cosy pubs, and a varied, dramatic countryside.

The city is uniquely made up of six towns: Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton and Longton. They came together to create Stoke-on-Trent as a federation of six towns in 1910. King George V granted Stoke-on-Trent city status on 5 June 1925, on the basis of its outstanding importance as the centre of the pottery industry. Throughout 2025, Stoke is celebrating its city-status centenary with events ranging from concerts to parties and parades.

Today, the heritage of the area is firmly recognised, with attractions that reflect its history. The popular TV show *The Great Pottery Throw Down* is filmed at Gladstone Pottery Museum in the town of Longton, ▶

Previous spread, left to right: **Wedgwood's iconic neoclassical jasperware; a sunset view from Hen Cloud in the Roaches**
These pages, clockwise from top left: **Gladstone Pottery Museum; Emma Bridgewater Factory; throw a pot at World of Wedgwood; tour Middleport Pottery**


Rudyard Lake
The Roaches
Leek
Middleport
Emma Bridgewater Factory
Stoke-on-Trent
Alton Towers
Trentham Estate
Gladstone Pottery Museum
World of Wedgwood
Stone
Swynnerton
STAFFORDSHIRE

PHOTOS: © JON LEWIS/ALAMY; EMMA BRIDGEWATER; WORLD OF WEDGEWOOD; JEN MILES/MIDDLEPORT POTTERY. ILLUSTRATION: LAURA HALLETT

an example of a Victorian pottery factory that has been turned into a visitor attraction, with displays and demonstrations that show what it was like to work here.

Perhaps the best introduction to pottery in North Staffordshire is World of Wedgwood. On the southern fringes of Stoke-on-Trent in the village of Barlaston, here visitors can learn about Josiah Wedgwood, the 18th-century potter who revolutionised how factories made products. In the past, one person would make a pot, whereas Wedgwood brought in the production line that saw many people involved in making an individual item – something that has dramatically shaped industry ever since.

The on-site V&A Wedgwood Collection explores this history. Naturally, there are many examples of Wedgwood pottery from the 18th century to the present day, including the distinctive blue neoclassical jasperware. If all this has left you feeling inspired, World of Wedgewood's clay studio offers pre-booked hour-long taster sessions for visitors to try their hand at throwing a pot on a potter's wheel – thankfully with staff on hand to help with any unwieldly clay.

A more contemporary ceramic success story is the Emma Bridgewater Factory, founded in the 1980s in the town of Hanley. Visitors can join a factory tour to see just what goes into making a mug, but perhaps best of all is booking into the decorating studio to unleash your artistic side by painting your own plate.

In the pottery industry's heyday there were thousands of towering bottle ovens punctuating Stoke's skyline. Today, around 47 remain

The on-site café does a rather nice afternoon tea, complete with crumbly scones slathered in clotted cream and jam, served on a delightful mishmash of colourful Emma Bridgewater crockery. The nearby Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in the city centre explores the history of ceramics, with other galleries specialising in local history and fine art.

Middleport Pottery in the north of the city is home to Burleigh Pottery, which has been in continual use since 1889 and offers factory tours. It's also an important historic site. Bottle ovens – huge brick kilns shaped like a bottle – were once used ▶

Left: **A Burleigh Pottery teapot featuring the factory's famed blue-and-white florals**
Below: **A narrowboat navigates the Caldon Canal near the village of Denford**

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Top to bottom: **Take a break at Wedgwood Tea Room; visit the Capability Brown-designed Italian gardens at Trentham Estate**

to fire pottery, and in the industry's heyday, there were thousands of these towering structures punctuating Stoke's skyline. Around 47 are left, including one at Middleport which visitors can step inside as part of the site's heritage tour.

It's not all pots and plates. The sprawling Trentham Estate in the south of the city features stunning Italian gardens, and a mile-long lake created by renowned 18th-century gardener and landscape architect Capability Brown. It's a place where locals and visitors alike head for an afternoon stroll, passing by the babbling River Trent and through ancient wildflower meadows and woodland.

Keep an eye out for Trentham's resident beaver family – reintroduced to the area in 2023. Beavers are a native species but were hunted to extinction more than 400 years ago. There are now efforts to reintroduce them in parts of the country, particularly as they help restore wetland and woodland habitats, and Trentham organises regular events to watch the beavers in action.

Head a little further south and you'll find the market town of Stone, with independent shops and cafes. Nearby is the Fitzherbert Arms in the village of Swynnerton, the ideal place for a traditional homemade pub dinner. The warm glow of flickering candles on

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tables and a crackling fire, together with the friendly bustle of locals enjoying a drink, make this a cosy, relaxing place for a meal. Rest up at The Fitzherbert Farmhouse across the road.

Below: **The town of Leek's cobbled Church Lane is one of Staffordshire's many pretty chocolate-box streets**

CHURCH LANE

PHOTO: © JONATHAN STATHAM/ALAMY

Staffordshire features dramatic landscapes, with the Peak District National Park reaching into the north-east of the county. The Roaches is a popular walking spot for those who like a challenging hike. It features striking gritstone ridges, and in the summer purple heather blankets the moorland, wafting its delicate earthy scent. A designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the Roaches is home to wildlife including peregrines and red grouse. Local legend tells of how a mermaid inhabits the small pond of Doxey Pool at the summit, enticing unsuspecting walkers into the waters.

East of Stoke-on-Trent, the Staffordshire Moorlands area is perhaps best known for the Alton Towers Resort. While rollercoasters are what draw the crowds today, Alton Towers' history stretches long before its time as a theme park: the gothic stately home at its centre was once the county seat of the Earl of Shrewsbury. Its formal gardens were created in the 18th and 19th centuries, and can still be explored by those wanting a peaceful break from thrill rides.

If you're not in the mood for rollercoasters, the tranquil Rudyard Lake, built as a reservoir in 1797, is another highlight of the Staffordshire Moorlands. Interestingly, the author Rudyard Kipling owes his distinctive first name to Rudyard Lake, thanks to his parents' fondness for this beauty spot. Sitting on a grassy bank by the water, watching canoes drifting along while families amble the circuit around the lake, it's easy to see why Kipling's parents were so entranced.

North Staffordshire boasts other literary links. The author Arnold Bennett was born in Hanley in 1867, and his novels and short stories often drew on life in the Staffordshire Potteries in which he grew up. One of his most famous works is *Anna of the Five Towns*, published in 1902 and adapted into a BBC TV drama series in 1985.

Arthur Berry was a 20th century playwright and artist whose work, like Bennett's, was influenced by his home of Stoke-on-Trent and the surrounding area. He was drawn to exploring working-class life, and this year a series of events marks 100 years since his birth, tying in with the city's own centenary celebrations.

It doesn't take long to fall for this part of the country – and you may even find by the end of your visit that you too start picking up plates to see if they were made in Stoke-on-Trent.

See our new website **discoverbritain.com** for more on the Potteries

THE PLANNER

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

There are regular direct trains from London Euston to Stoke-on-Trent (1hr 30min). Local buses serve Stoke-on-Trent and the surrounding area, mostly run by First Bus. *thetrainline.com; firstbus.co.uk/potteries*

WHERE TO STAY

The Fitzherbert Farmhouse in the village of Swynnerton is a characterful 200-year-old converted farmhouse. It's just to the south of Stoke-on-Trent, ideally placed for exploring the city while enjoying the peace of the countryside. Wake up to views of the village from your room, with a hearty breakfast cooked to order across the road at The Fitzherbert Arms – this popular pub is also a good choice for dinner and drinks. *fitzherbertfarmhouse.co.uk*

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Lunar is an elegant yet relaxed fine-dining restaurant near World of Wedgwood with a seasonal menu, featuring hearty dishes like slow-cooked beef cheek with butternut squash. A large moon hangs in the centre of the room, in tribute to the Enlightenment group the Lunar Society, of which Josiah Wedgwood was a member.

The Packing House Café at Middleport Pottery serves sweet treats and lunches, including local delicacy Staffordshire oatcakes, similar to crêpes made with oats and served with savoury fillings like melted cheese – a must-try on any visit to Stoke. *lunarwedgwood.com; re-form.org/middleportpottery*

FURTHER INFORMATION

visitstoke.co.uk; visitstaffordshire.com

For details of Stoke-on-Trent's centenary events see *sot100.org.uk*

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As well as a two-night stay, our winners will also enjoy a three-course dinner on one night of their stay at the hotel's stylish restaurant, The Plumicorn, which offers more stunning views from its floor-to-ceiling windows and a delicious menu of seasonal dishes made with fresh local ingredients.

If you can tear yourself away from The Tawny, the surrounding area is a delight to explore. Visit local pottery factories, take a nostalgic steam train ride on the Churnet Valley Railway, or travel to magnificent Chatsworth House. It's all on the doorstep of this magical country estate.
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HOW TO ENTER

For your chance to win this fantastic prize, enter online at **www.discoverbritain.com/competitions/tawny**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS Closing date for entries is 23.59 GMT on 13 August 2025. The prize must be taken by 12 August 2026, and is for two adults sharing a room, including breakfast each morning and dinner on one evening (three courses per person; alcohol excluded). Stays are available between Sunday and Thursday nights only, bookings are subject to availability, and the prize is not valid on UK public holidays or and during the Christmas period (24 December – 2 January). The prize does not include insurance, transport, personal expenditure or incidental costs.

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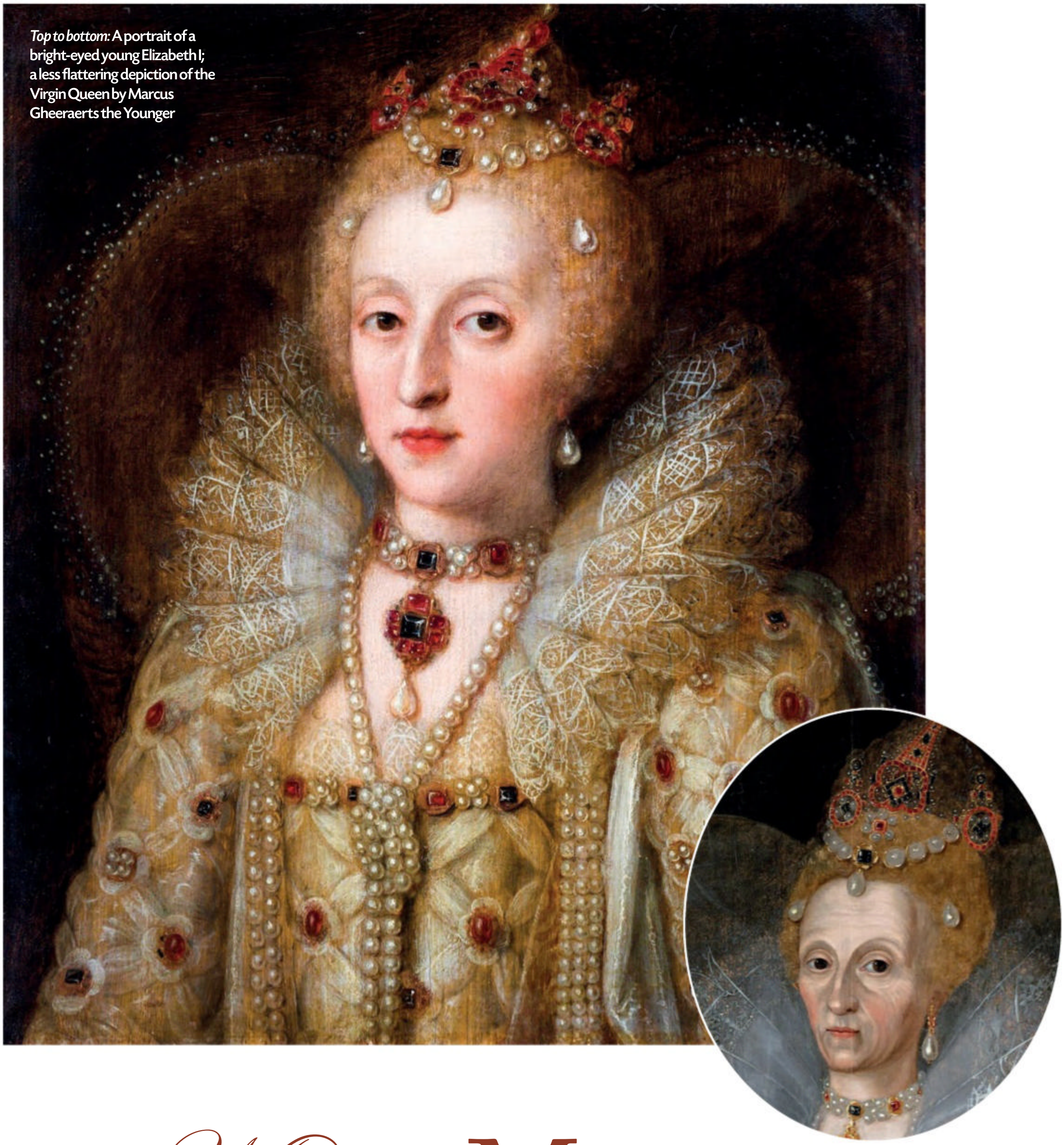


Top to bottom: A portrait of a bright-eyed young Elizabeth I; a less flattering depiction of the Virgin Queen by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger

PHOTOS: © INCAMERASTOCK/PHOTO 12/ALAMY

Mirror Mirror

Royals have always been conscious of their public image, and in past centuries would go to outlandish and even deadly lengths in pursuit of a youthful appearance

WORDS **NEIL JONES**

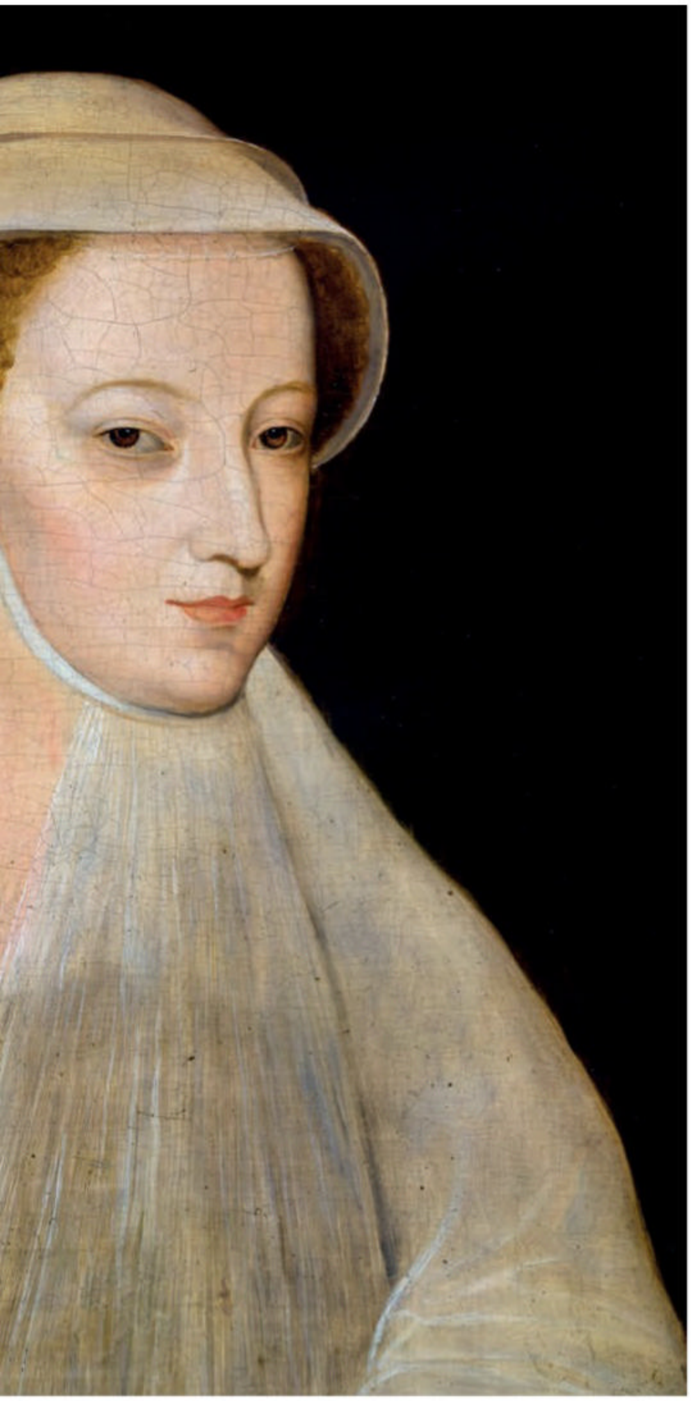
Last December when Queen Camilla awarded Royal Warrants to a handful of companies in recognition of their goods and services to her, it was unsurprising that she included her hairdresser (Jo Hansford) and supplier of skincare products (Heaven Health & Beauty Ltd), as well as three couturiers and a milliner. Her Majesty follows a long line of royals conscious of their public image, and the new warrant-holders have doubtless helped her to style her look of natural glamour.

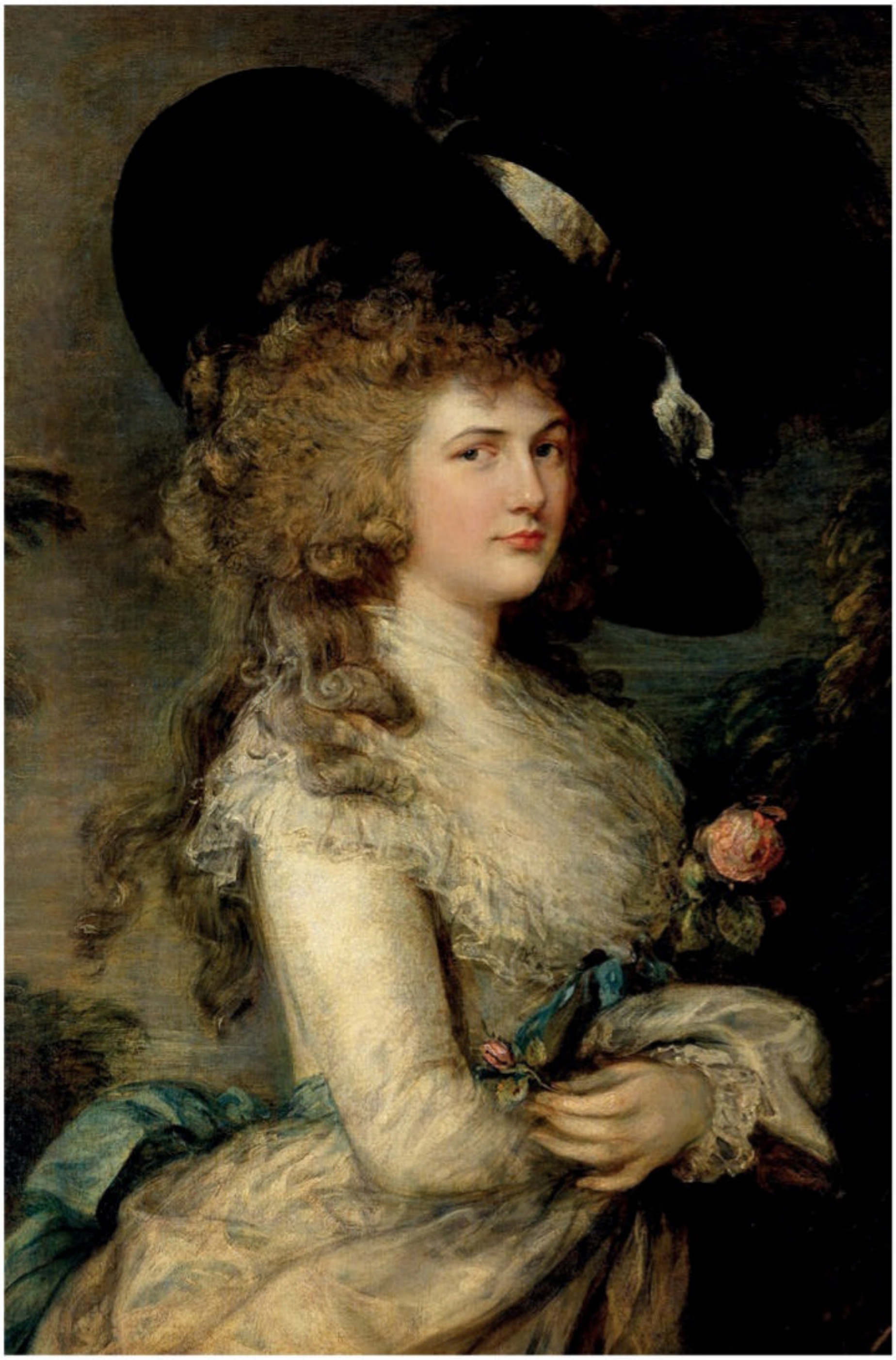
A delve into the cosmetics bags of some earlier royals and aristocrats reveals rather alarming beauty secrets, however, giving a sinister undertone to the phrase 'drop-dead gorgeous'.

In the Elizabethan era, the renaissance ideal of fair hair, pale complexion, red lips and bright eyes signalled not only beauty but also the wealth and status of people untainted by toil on the land; a flawless skin reflected virtue, while blemishes (it was believed) could be physical manifestations of sinfulness.

Queen Elizabeth I instinctively grasped the importance of public image from the get-go and led the way in must-have makeup. In her youth, she adopted relatively little artifice but from age 29 in 1562, when a near-fatal case of smallpox left her skin pitted, she increasingly applied a concealing foundation of ceruse on her face and neck – resulting in the iconic silvery-white mask of her later reign. Her

PHOTOS: © SUPERSTOCK; IAN DAGNALL COMPUTING/ALAMY/GEORGIANA DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE IMAGE REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF CHATSWORTH SETTLEMENT TRUSTEES/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES





royal motto ‘semper eadem’ (always the same) clearly took considerable effort.

The problem with ceruse was that it contained white lead and vinegar, which ate into the royal skin, making it grey and wrinkled – prompting ever thicker layers of the corrosive cosmetic to be caked on in a vicious cycle of vanity. Elizabeth also favoured vermilion – powdered cinnabar, which contains mercury – to colour cheeks and lips: she very likely ingested the toxic substance every time she licked her lips, possibly contributing to her later mood swings, irritability and depression.

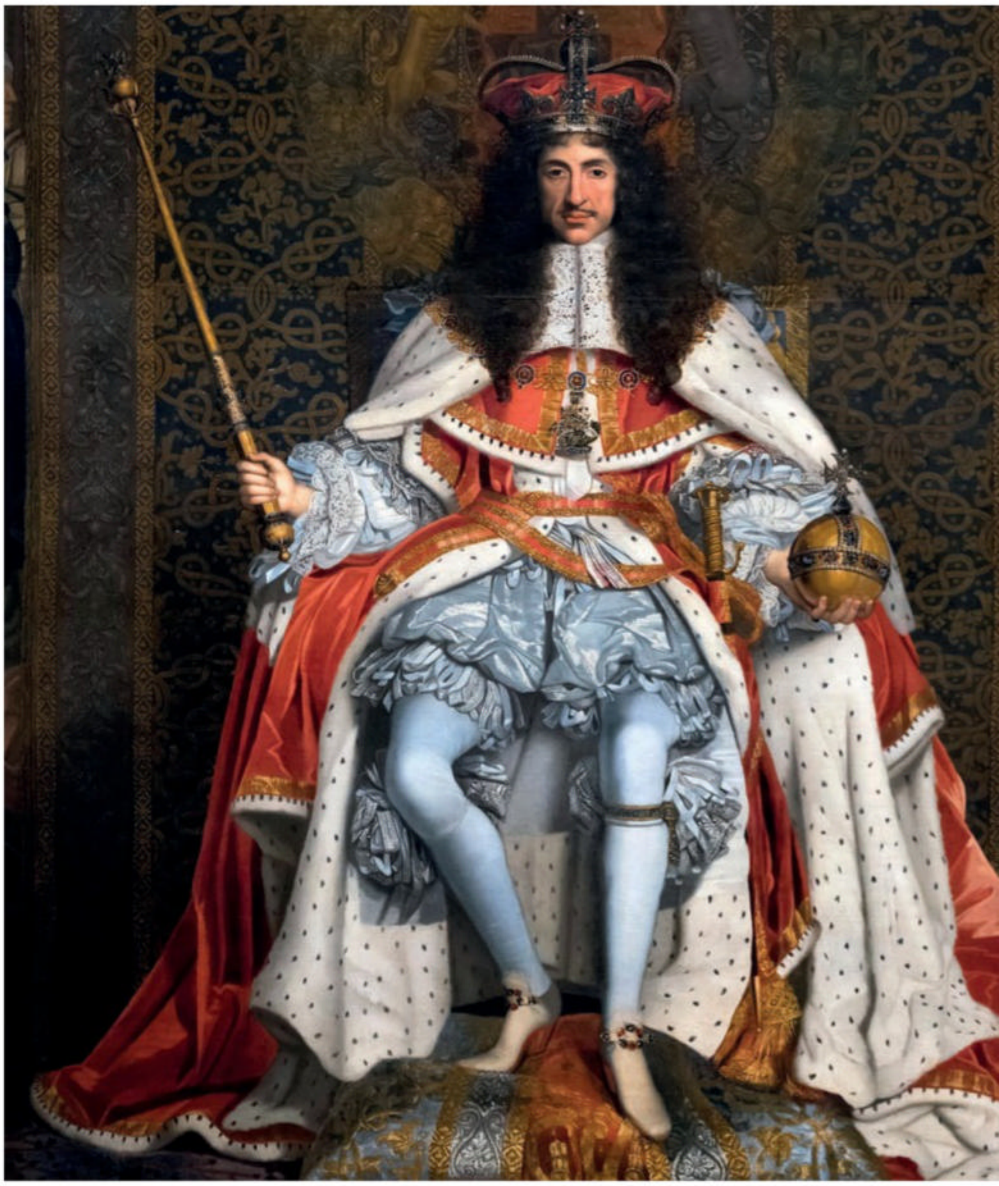
Drops of belladonna – deadly nightshade – added sparkle to eyes (and hastened visual impairments); fashionably high, narrow-arched brows and a high hairline required painful plucking; Elizabeth’s ageing wispy, grey hair was hidden beneath a red wig. When the royal teeth decayed, the Queen’s influence on aristocratic style was so pervasive that some women even mimicked the look by blackening their teeth!

Elizabeth never met her rival Mary, Queen of Scots face-to-face, but she was wont to quiz her (sensibly tight-lipped) envoys: which of the two women was the fairest? Graceful, auburn-haired Mary was said to exercise “some enchantment whereby men are

These pages, left to right: **A young Queen Elizabeth II; Mary Queen of Scots swore by white-wine baths; Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, captured her by Gainsborough, influenced Georgian beauty trends**

Elizabeth I caked on ever thicker layers of corrosive ceruse in a vicious cycle of vanity

Auburn-haired Mary, Queen of Scots believed that having white wine poured into her bath improved her complexion



bewitched", a power perhaps enhanced by the effects of her reported penchant for having white wine poured into her bath, which she thought improved her complexion. During her captivity in England, a pain in one of her sides also prompted Mary to seek relief through "strengthening baths of white wine".

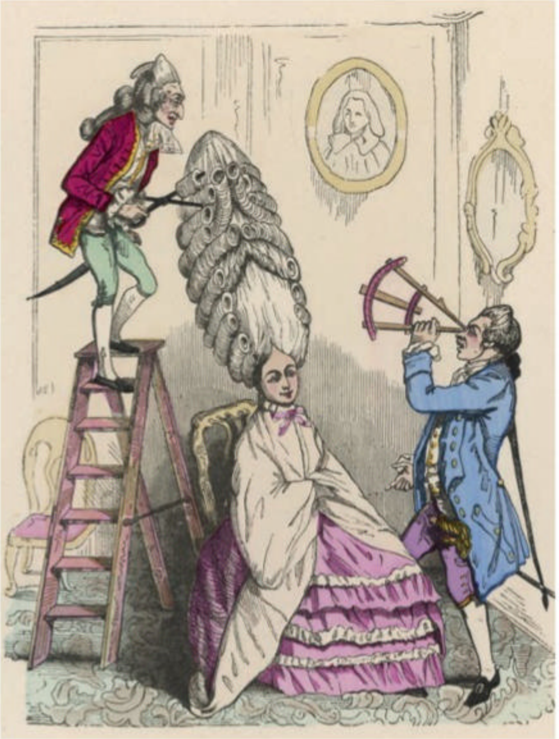
Etiquette around washing was a vexed subject. In 1600s England, soap was heavily taxed, putting it beyond the reach of all but the wealthy until the duty was repealed in the 19th century. Books offered alternative skin-cleansing recipes featuring herbs and flower petals, but today we might balk at the suggestion in *The Accomplisht Ladys Delight in Preserving, Physick, Beautfying, and Cookery* (1675) that urine was "very good to wash the face withal, to make it fair". The same tome advised "ashes of Goats-dung mingled with Oyl" if you wanted thick, glossy hair. Meanwhile, men worried about baldness might tackle offending patches by rubbing in a noxious mixture of rat droppings, honey and onion juice.

Washing one's hair was, frankly, asking for trouble, as it was believed a wet head was more vulnerable to infiltration by evil humours. In 1653, diarist John Evelyn got around the problem by vowing no more than an annual hair-wash; otherwise, a swift rub of a cloth removed dirt and dandruff.

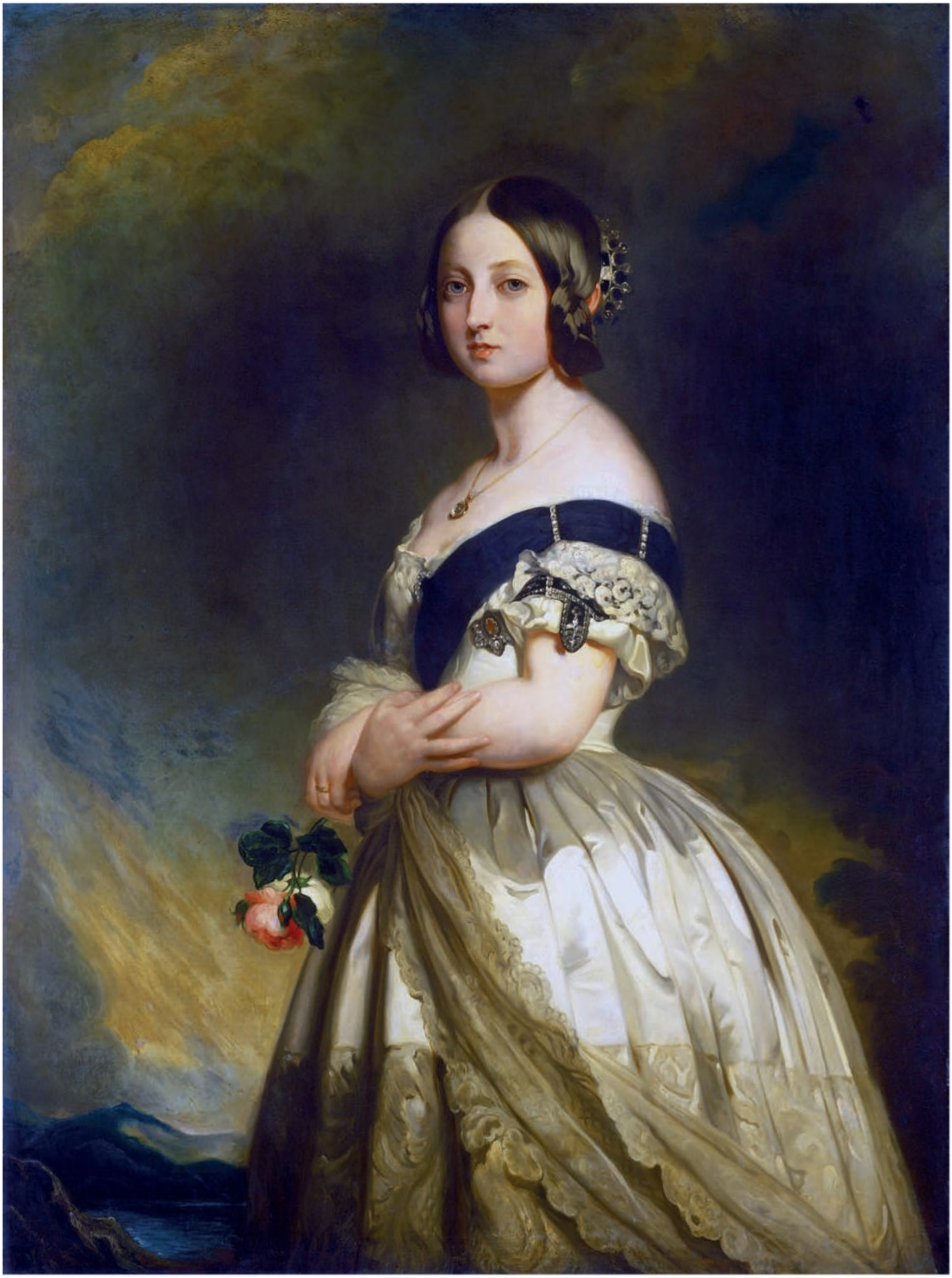
King Charles II delighted in huge, dark curly wigs but it was in the 18th century that wig-dressers really came to prominence, styling and powdering adornments for men of all classes. Long and curling full-bottomed wigs became passé, overtaken by more compact 'bag-wigs' with side hair in rows of stiff, tight curls in tasteful grey or white, though fashionable young fops known as the Macaronis (many of whom had 'done' the European Tour) espoused towering hair of epic proportions, much satirised by cartoonists.

Society portraits by Reynolds or Gainsborough show that Georgian ladies still managed to outdo the men in extravagant, back-combed hairstyles, blending their own tresses with false ones, on wooden frames or padding, the high-rise ensembles plastered into place using oily pomatum. Such edifices, in shades ranging from grey and black to pink and blue, could take all day to create and be worn for a month; itching was alleviated by means of long, fork-like head-scratchers.

In the 1770s Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, took things to extremes when she led a craze for hair towers of preposterous design: one day, a nautical look, with storm-tossed ships and sailors bobbing amid her curls; another day, a pastoral tableau featuring miniature ▶



These pages, clockwise from top left: **Charles II helped start a trend for flowing, curly men's wigs; Queen Victoria took a less-is-more approach to her beauty regime; the Georgian fashion for gravity-defying hairstyles is mocked in this cartoon**



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> Queen Victoria considered ‘obvious’ make-up vulgar and put her trust in elderflower water and chamomile tea

FLORIS
Perfumes
89
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Top to bottom: **Queen Camilla and Catherine, Princess of Wales take a more natural approach to beauty than the royals of centuries past; perfumer Floris created scents for Queen Victoria’s wedding and to mark Elizabeth II’s Platinum Jubilee**

wooden sheep. Played by Keira Knightley in the film *The Duchess*, Georgiana was in real life far more than simply a pretty face, but her mother still lamented, “how glad I should be if you could tell me you had quite done with rouge” – considered ‘French’ and improper.

Porcelain skin (ceruse), dark eyebrows (burnt-clove eyebrow pencil) and flushed rosy cheeks (vermilion) continued to feature in ideals of beauty, with the ultimate accessory of a face-patch made of dark silk or velvet to accentuate the pallor of skin – and hide pockmarks or blemishes.

But not everyone was a fan. The 6th Earl of Coventry banned his wife Maria from using dodgy cosmetics and, when she defied him at dinner, he publicly shamed her by rubbing the offending artifice from her face with his handkerchief. Maria died in 1760, aged 27, and although never proven, it was assumed her cosmetics ‘addiction’ had hastened her premature end.

Soon (and not before time) a backlash against harmful, heavy makeup gathered pace and a more ‘natural’ look gained favour, albeit helped by tricks like daubs of beetroot to bring a healthy glow to cheeks.

Queen Victoria considered ‘obvious’ makeup vulgar – the preserve of actresses and loose women – and put her trust in elderflower water for washing her face and hands, also bathing her eyes with soothing chamomile tea after a long day. She retained hairdressers to effect her signature neat, plaited, low bun hairstyle: an expression of modesty and simplicity.

Victoria had her gloves scented with rose oil to ward off any unpleasant smells, and perfumers Floris created a fragrance, Bouquet de la Reine, as a wedding gift to her when she married Prince Albert in 1840; a re-imagined “floral, fruity” eau-de-toilette version is still in the company’s repertoire today. Awarded its first Royal Warrant in 1820, as smooth-pointed comb maker to King George IV, Floris remains a favourite with King Charles III.

The late Queen Elizabeth II got special treatment too, when she had a lipstick created for her by Clarins in a soft, blue-red shade to complement her coronation robes in 1953. While known for her bright colour-block dressing, Elizabeth generally espoused a less-is-more attitude to makeup: her go-to for nail polish, for example, was Essie’s Ballet Slippers for sheer shine and barely-there hues. Our modern royal women, including Queen Camilla and Catherine, Princess of Wales, also incline to the more natural ‘no-makeup makeup’ approach. Simply glamorous. B

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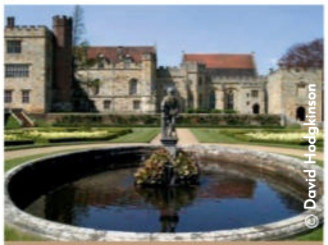

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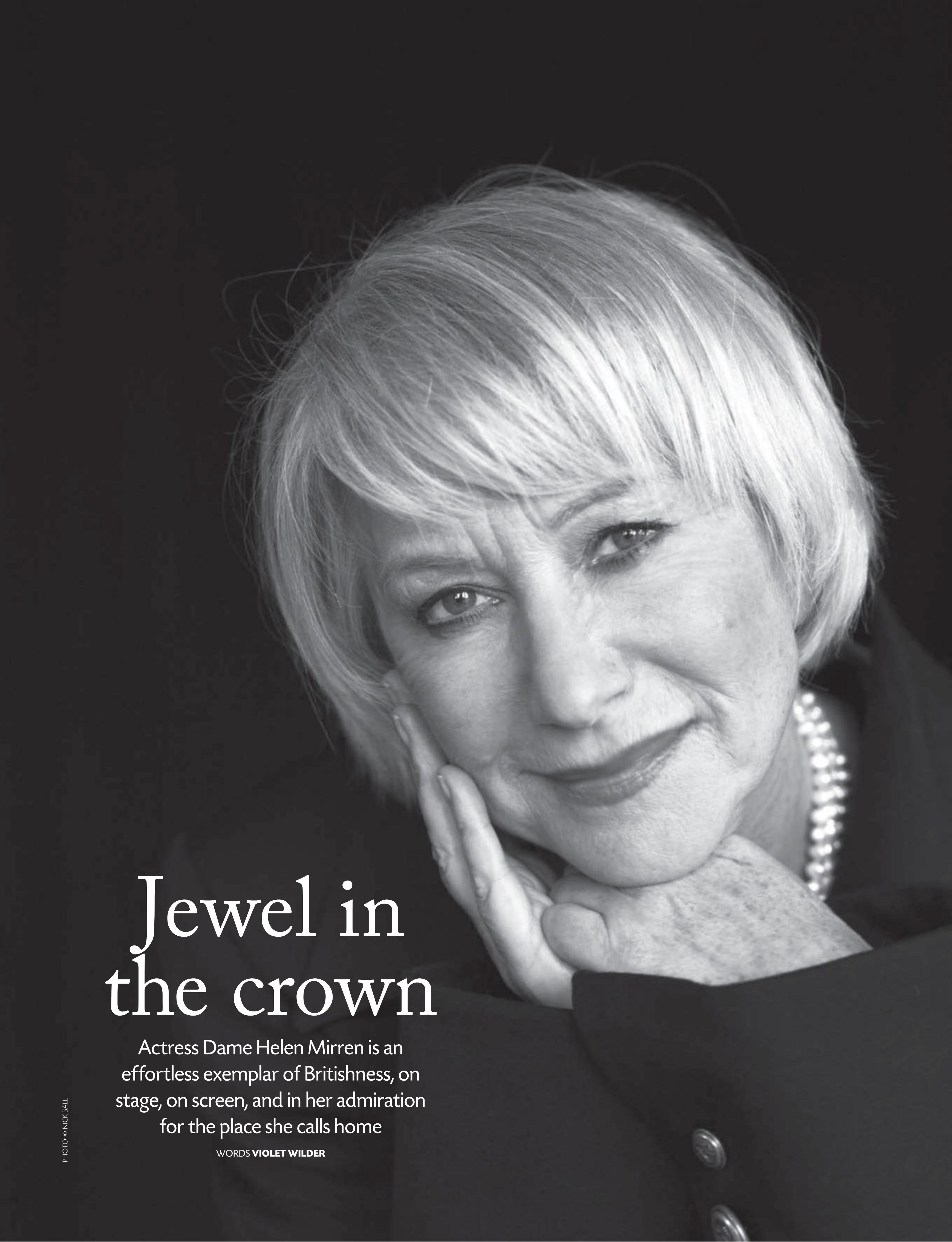

Jewel in the crown

Actress Dame Helen Mirren is an effortless exemplar of Britishness, on stage, on screen, and in her admiration for the place she calls home

WORDS **VIOLET WILDER**

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There are a few select roles that every British female actor covets: Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, George Bernard Shaw's Eliza Doolittle and Oscar Wilde's Lady Bracknell, to name but three. Yet perhaps the most sought-after and intimidating is that of Queen Elizabeth II, and it's one Dame Helen Mirren has embraced twice in her illustrious career.

The iconic actress, 80 this year, first portrayed Queen Elizabeth II in the 2006 film *The Queen*, a performance that earned her an Academy Award. She reprised this regal role in the play *The Audience*, which opened in 2013 and showcased various pivotal meetings between the head of state and her various prime ministers over the years.

"Playing Queen Elizabeth was very demanding, physically and mentally," admits the actress. "I'm not that sort of method-type actor. I'm just not. Yet every role brings different challenges, and that's what you sign up to."

Mirren's pursuit of peak performance is very much at odds with humble, yet altogether happy beginnings. The actress was born in London in July 1945, just two months before the cessation of the Second World War, to an English mother and Russian father. She was raised in Leigh-on-Sea, a picturesque coastal town in the south-east of England, approximately 40 miles east of the capital.

Born in the same region that also gave the world another grand Dame, the actress Maggie Smith, she is a fierce advocate of the county from which she hails: Essex.

"I'll always be an Essex girl!" she laughs. "It's on the doorstep of London's financial district, but is coastal and extremely rural as well. Its people are bold and confident, yet famously emotional and transparent too.

"I've sometimes called Leigh and neighbouring Southend my little piece of Sorrento over here!" says Mirren, referencing the idyllic home she has in Italy. "Yet in reality, it's very different. It's a proper British seaside resort, as are so many, with rustic charm winning over serenity and grandeur."

Mirren fondly recalls how her mother encouraged her to lose her 'estuary accent'; as the River Thames flows towards the sea, that famous cockney twang becomes a raucous Essex blend of dropped consonants and gutter vowels. "Back then there was an expectation of how you should sound in this business. Of course, so much of that has flipped nowadays – such lack of diction has since become popular among England's upper classes.

"However I've sounded over the years, I'd never lose my roots. They define who I am. I always wanted that edge."

That so-called edge, combined with the actress's sharp wit and boundless talent, have bestowed upon her the status of a national treasure. Yet, she remains surprisingly humble, and despite an

PHOTOS: © GREG BALFOUR EVANS/CHRIS HARRIS/NATHANIEL NOIR/ALLESANDRO SAFFO/ALAMY; MOVIESTILLSDB/PATHE UK

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extensive back catalogue and a plethora of awards, insists she isn't a movie star. "No, I've never thought of myself as that; never considered myself anything close. I'm a working actress who's been fortunate and lucky, and sometimes the stars align in a certain way," she says modestly.

Her life off-camera is also admirably straightforward. Mirren has never had children, explaining in the past that she has "no maternal instinct whatsoever". Next year, she and her husband, Hollywood director Taylor Hackford, known for *Ray* and *An Officer and a Gentleman*, will mark four decades together – an impressive feat in any walk of life, and practically a miracle in Hollywood.

It helps, no doubt, that the couple live a low-key life. Away from the spotlight, Mirren is as unique and original as a London resident as she is as an actress. She lives in a four-storey 19th century townhouse in Wapping, a former industrial hub of east London, having felt drawn to the cobbled ruggedness of the area when filming *The Long Good Friday* way back in 1980.

"It has changed so much since then but it retains a stylish nod ▶

"I'll always be an Essex girl! It's on the doorstep of London but extremely rural. Its people are bold and confident, yet famously emotional and transparent too"

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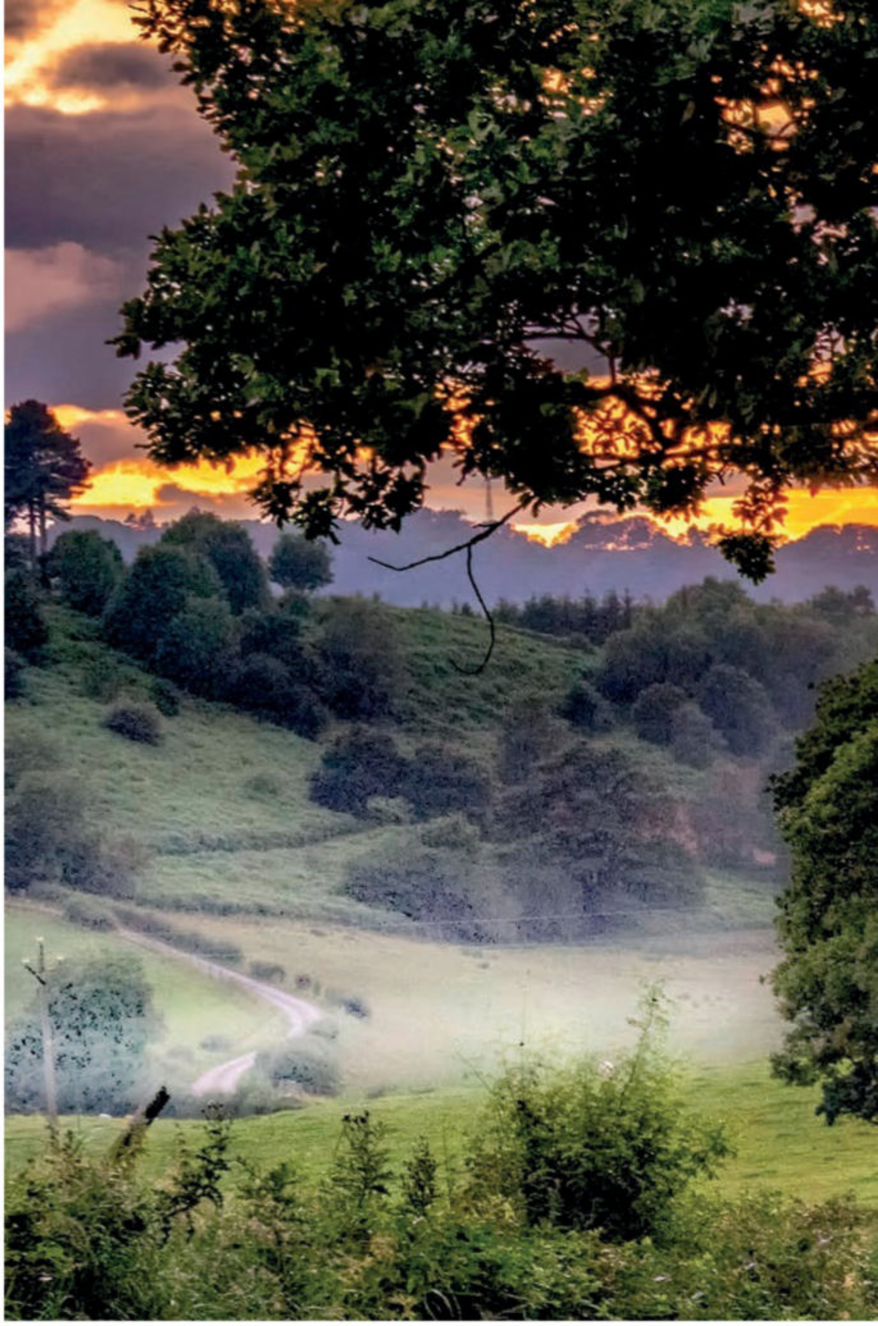
***Previous page:* Dame Helen Mirren is one of Britain's best-loved actresses *Clockwise from bottom left:* She recommends exploring the capital's street fairs, like Portobello Market; Old Leigh's cobbled high street; Wapping is home to traditional East End pubs; Helen advises taking a stroll across Waterloo Bridge; Helen's Oscar-winning turn as Elizabeth II**



Clockwise from above: **Helen is fascinated by York's history; she filmed *The Duke* in Bradford; Helen has acted in an array of films, from the period drama *Gosford Park* to the action blockbuster *Red;* the actress loves Yorkshire landscapes; starring alongside Celia Imrie and Sir Ben Kingsley in *The Thursday Murder Club,* out later this year**

towards tradition and industry. Things have always got done in Wapping – the ships, the docks, the newspaper trade. For a while we had a period of quiet isolation because of the changes to the London Underground network, but now the area feels a bit more connected and is, dare I say it, somewhat trendy!"

Referencing the capital's millionaire haunts, Mirren, who was made a dame in 2003 by the late Queen Elizabeth II, admits: "I've never been tempted by the opulence of Mayfair or Kensington, or even the greenery of west London, although I do love the history and the architecture of London period properties. The buildings are just magnificent and I'd advise any tourist just to spend a day wandering around street markets, down alleyways, across Waterloo Bridge – just get lost in the capital.

"As an actress, as well, there's always a fascination in that sense of mystery – what lives and loves lurk behind a closed door. I find that as intriguing now as I did when I was a young girl."

The star's passion for leaning leftfield isn't just focused on the confines of London. Mirren reveals a deep admiration for the Yorkshire city of Bradford (a place not used to having intense praise laden upon it). While there to film Warner Bros film *The Duke*, she marvelled in the people, culture and food. "The people of Yorkshire aren't too far removed from those I grew up around in Essex," she says. "There's an honesty, a friendliness, and a feeling of

PHOTOS: © ASSOCIATED PRESS/ALAMY/GORDON BELL/K7 PHOTOGRAPHY/ GILES-KEYTE/ COURTESY OF NETFLIX 2024/ANDREW PICKETT/VISITBRITAIN

community at every turn. Also, great curries!" she laughs.

"Bradford has around it the most amazing natural scenery – you've got the Yorkshire Moors, the Dales, sweeping green fields and, in places like York, history that dates back 2,000 years. It's really remarkable."

The actress, who at 20 was already playing Cleopatra at London's Old Vic Theatre, and has gone on to star in the likes of *Gosford Park*, *The Madness of King George*, *Excalibur*, *Red* and more, also notes that she finds an increased personal freedom the further she strays from London. "I like just being able to get on with life," she says. "My husband and I once got papped when we were leaving a Costco store in London – we had a trolley with a microwave in it!" she laughs. "It was very funny."

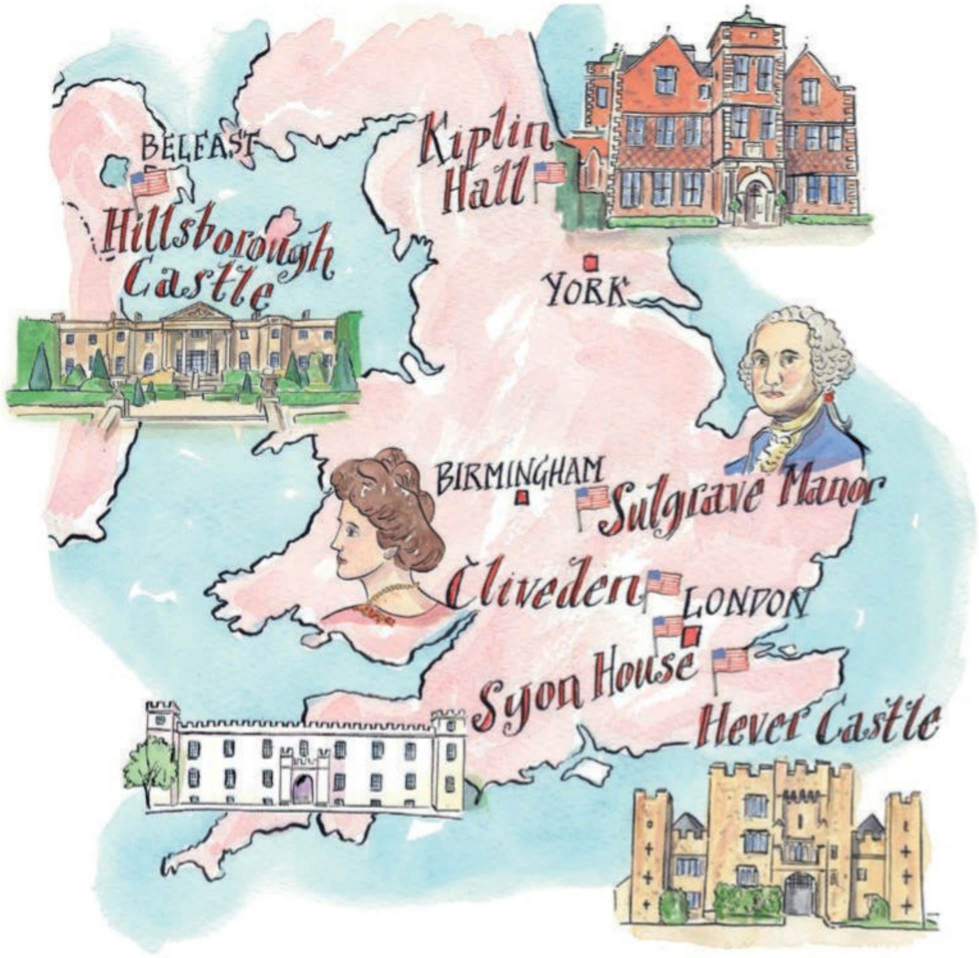
Later this year, Mirren is set to play Elizabeth Best, a retired spy, in the film adaptation of Richard Osman's hit 2020 novel, *The Thursday Murder Club*. It tells the story of a group of septuagenarians who tire of taking it slow in their assisted living community and instead set about solving murders. "I make it a pledge to push myself in my roles, and always want to play someone younger than me. Well, that's becoming more and more likely," she laughs, "yet there's something wonderfully rebellious about this story and its characters, and that's always going to pique my interest."

And on the subject of retirement? "It all sounds incredibly tedious, yet so many times I've told my husband, 'I've done enough – I'm not going to keep pushing myself', then do exactly the opposite.

"It's got the point now that he doesn't even pay attention to me anymore when I make that kind of a declaration. The terrible truth is that I simply cannot resist a good role!"

This image: Sulgrave Manor is the historic Northamptonshire seat of first US president George Washington's ancestors

PHOTO: © DAVID HUMPHREYS/ALAMY. ILLUSTRATION: MICHAEL A. HILL


BELFAST
Hillsborough Castle
Kiplin Hall
YORK
BIRMINGHAM
Sulgrave Manor
Cliveden
LONDON
Syon House
Hever Castle

Homes of the Brave

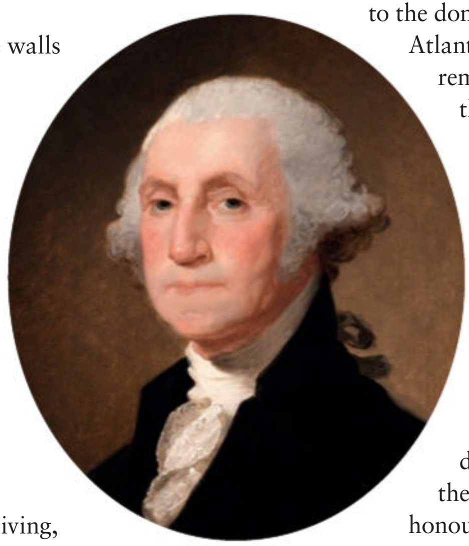
These English stately homes have American connections going back centuries, which continue to endure

WORDS **FELICITY DAY**

It was 'the shot heard round the world' – the exchange of gunfire at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts on 19 April 1775 that kickstarted the revolution in Britain's American colonies, and resulted in their triumphant declaration of independence the following year. But despite that legendary parting of the ways, a strong bond still ties our two nations together almost 250 years on; one found not just in wartime alliances or the warm words of politicians, nor even in a shared language, but rooted right here, in the bricks and oak beams of Britain's historic houses.

Take Sulgrave Manor, whose sturdy limestone walls hold the ancestral history of America's very first President, George Washington. Nestled in a Northamptonshire hamlet, the unshowy house is a rare survivor of the Tudor era, built in the 1540s for the revered general's five-times great-grandfather, a successful wool merchant and early Mayor of Northampton.

It was a sign of his family's social rise, but it was also, just a century later, the site of their crashing fall, when during the English Civil War the Puritans took their revenge on the manor's then-owner. Lawrence Washington, a Royalist clergyman, had made himself their enemy, and they seized the opportunity to strip him of his lucrative church living, leaving the reverend with no choice but to sell his family home. It was his financial ruin that spurred three of his children to try their luck in the New World, among them Lt. Colonel John Washington, the great-grandfather of the future president, who settled in Virginia in 1657.



Clockwise from right: **Cliveden House was bought by William Waldorf Astor; a bedroom and the Lady Walpole Room at Kiplin Hall; the generosity of Marylanders has restored the house; an 1821 portrait of George Washington**

The English home that had been the pride of his forefathers was all but forgotten until 1914, when a plan was made to purchase and restore it by public subscription, in commemoration of the century of Anglo-American peace that had followed the brief War of 1812. It's thanks to the donations that flooded in from both sides of the Atlantic that Sulgrave Manor stands in such remarkably fine fettle today; the Stars and Stripes that flutters outside providing the only clue that this period-perfect 16th-century home, presented as if a Shakespearean squire had just stepped out, shelters such an extensive selection of artefacts relating to one of the most famous Americans of all.

Just as historic is the 'special relationship' between the US and Kiplin Hall, a red-brick Jacobean beauty in the heart of North Yorkshire. It was built for George Calvert, the 1st Baron Baltimore, in the 1620s – just a decade before he was granted a charter to found the colony of Maryland, which he named in honour of King Charles I's Queen, Henrietta Maria. ▶

PHOTOS: © MARTIN SHIELDS/ALAMY; HUGH MORHERSOLE/NATIONAL TRUST; KIPLIN HALL

Kiplin Hall was built for the 1st Baron Baltimore just a decade before he founded the colony of Maryland

> The 1st Duke of Northumberland's illegitimate son bequeathed every penny he owned to the foundation of America's Smithsonian Institution

Calvert's family moved on, and Kiplin became home to, among others, a granddaughter of Charles II and a naval veteran of the Crimean war, but the bond between the small east-coast state and the house that many Marylanders regard as its birthplace remained. In fact, it's unlikely that Kiplin would still be standing if not for some of Maryland's generous residents.

Hard as it is to believe today, looking at the immaculate and very comfortable Victorian country-house interiors, as recently as 50 years ago, the hall was virtually derelict. Its final owner had reluctantly decided to demolish it, but changed her mind after she herself was knocked down by a car on the way to sign the papers, and the house was still – just – standing at her death in 1971. Marylanders stepped in with the funds to shore it up, and have continued to support it over the years as it has undergone a complete restoration.

Of course, the injection of American cash into ailing British stately homes is nothing new: the 'dollar princesses' who married into the aristocracy in the late 19th century, bringing huge dowries with them, saved more than a few from the wrecking ball. But so, too, did Americans who simply longed for a taste of English country life. Businessman William Waldorf Astor carried his enormous fortune (a reputed $100m) to Britain in the 1890s, where he promptly snapped up Italianate mansion Cliveden House in Buckinghamshire, and the historic Hever Castle in Kent, the childhood home of Anne Boleyn.

The latter might have been lost to history without Astor and his careful (and costly) restoration, which brought in all sorts of Tudor treasures; while under the stewardship of his son and daughter-in-law, Waldorf and Nancy, the former took on a new life as a notorious party pad, hosting plenty of their fellow Americans, from president Franklin D. Roosevelt, to ambassador Joseph Kennedy and author Edith Wharton. Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, followed in their star-spangled footsteps when she stayed at the house, now a luxurious hotel, on the night before her wedding to Prince Harry in 2018.

Yet the flow of funds hasn't always been one-way. Syon House in south London, home to the ancestors of the Duke of Northumberland since 1594, is a quintessentially British stately home, with the requisite Robert Adam interiors and Capability Brown-designed parkland, yet through a financial donation it has an intriguing connection with America's Smithsonian Institution. It was the 1st Duke's illegitimate son, James Smithson, a renowned chemist and mineralogist, who bequeathed in his will every penny he owned (some half a million dollars) for the establishment's foundation in Washington, D.C. ▶

Below: **Syon House was designed by neoclassical architect Robert Adam, whose vision was to create 'a palace of Greco-Roman splendour'**

PHOTO: © CAPTURE IT LTD/SYON HOUSE

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Smithson, as far as we know, was never welcomed into the magnificent rooms at Syon, full of family portraits and opulent furnishings, nor his father's Northumberland residence, Alnwick Castle. Both were inhabited (and inherited) by his half-siblings in the legitimate line, one of whom actually fought against the American revolutionaries whose aims it's thought Smithson admired.

Hugh Percy, the 2nd Duke of Northumberland, joined the army as a teenager, and 16 years later, as Brigadier-General of the 5th Regiment of Foot, was feted for his defensive action at Lexington and Concord, which averted a complete disaster for the British force. He served in the States for almost three years in all, during which time he formed a close friendship with Thayendanegea (also known as Joseph Brant), a Native American leader allied with the British. A copy of the portrait created of him for the duke by American artist Gilbert Stuart still hangs at Syon today.

Given that some 40 million Americans claim Irish descent, and that the US was heavily invested in the Northern Ireland peace process in the 1990s, no sweep through our American connections would be complete without a skip across the sea to the Emerald Isle. Many of the peace talks were conducted at the official residence of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Hillsborough Castle, a glorious Georgian stately home 12 miles outside Belfast.

Built for an aristocrat in the 1790s and recently splendidly restored by Historic Royal Palaces, it has hosted an array of American presidents over the years, including Eisenhower, Clinton and George W. Bush, though it can actually trace its history of UK-US political summits back much further. To 1771, in fact, when founding father Benjamin Franklin, resident in Britain as a spokesperson for colonial interests, was invited for an impromptu stay with its owner, Wills Hill, the Earl of Hillsborough and Britain's first Secretary of State for the American Colonies. Though cordial, their talks did nothing to diffuse the already growing tensions between their respective nations, and the rest, as they say, is history.

See our new website **discoverbritain.com** for more stately homes stories

Left to right: **The Red Room opening into the Dining Room at Hillsborough Castle; William Waldorf Astor invested in Hever Castle, taking on its lengthy and costly restoration**

PHOTOS: © HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES/JAMES BRITTAIN; DANIEL WATSON PHOTOGRAPHY/HEVER CASTLE & GARDENS

> Hillsborough Castle can trace its long history of UK-US political summits back to Benjamin Franklin's visit in 1771

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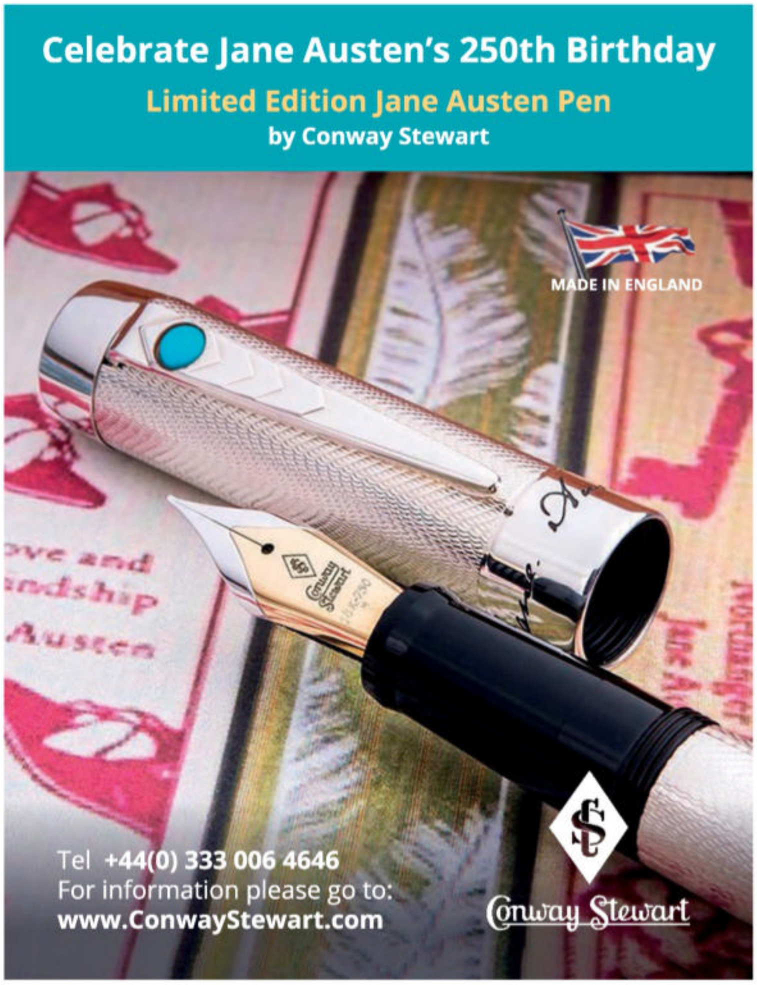

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The great escape

A commemorative sea crossing taking place in Ramsgate this spring will celebrate the daring evacuation of Dunkirk 85 years ago

WORDS **ROSE SHEPHERD**

PHOTO: © PAUL MARTIN NEWS/ALAMY

On 4 June 1940, prime minister Winston Churchill made a speech that would stiffen the nation's sinews and resonate down the years. "We shall go on to the end… We shall fight on the seas and oceans… we shall fight on the beaches… we shall fight in the hills, and we shall never surrender."

This powerful oratory drew inspiration from the Dunkirk evacuation, codenamed Operation Dynamo and hailed by Churchill as "a miracle of deliverance". In mid-May 1940, the shores of north-west France were a hellscape, the roadsides strewn with abandoned vehicles and artillery, the port of Dunkirk in flames. The Allied forces, driven to the water's edge by Hitler's Panzers, must have felt trapped between the devil and a cold grey sea, as Stuka sirens screamed overhead.

Yet help was at hand, with the approach of the most motley flotilla the world had ever seen. Not only troop ship, torpedo boat, minesweeper, gunboat and destroyer had been mobilised, but drifter and dredger, corvette, cargo ship and cabin cruiser, landing craft, launch, liner and lifeboat, smack, sloop, paddle steamer, ferry, tug, barge, ketch, yacht, yawl, whaler, whelker, cockle boat… Requisitioned or volunteered, some 750-

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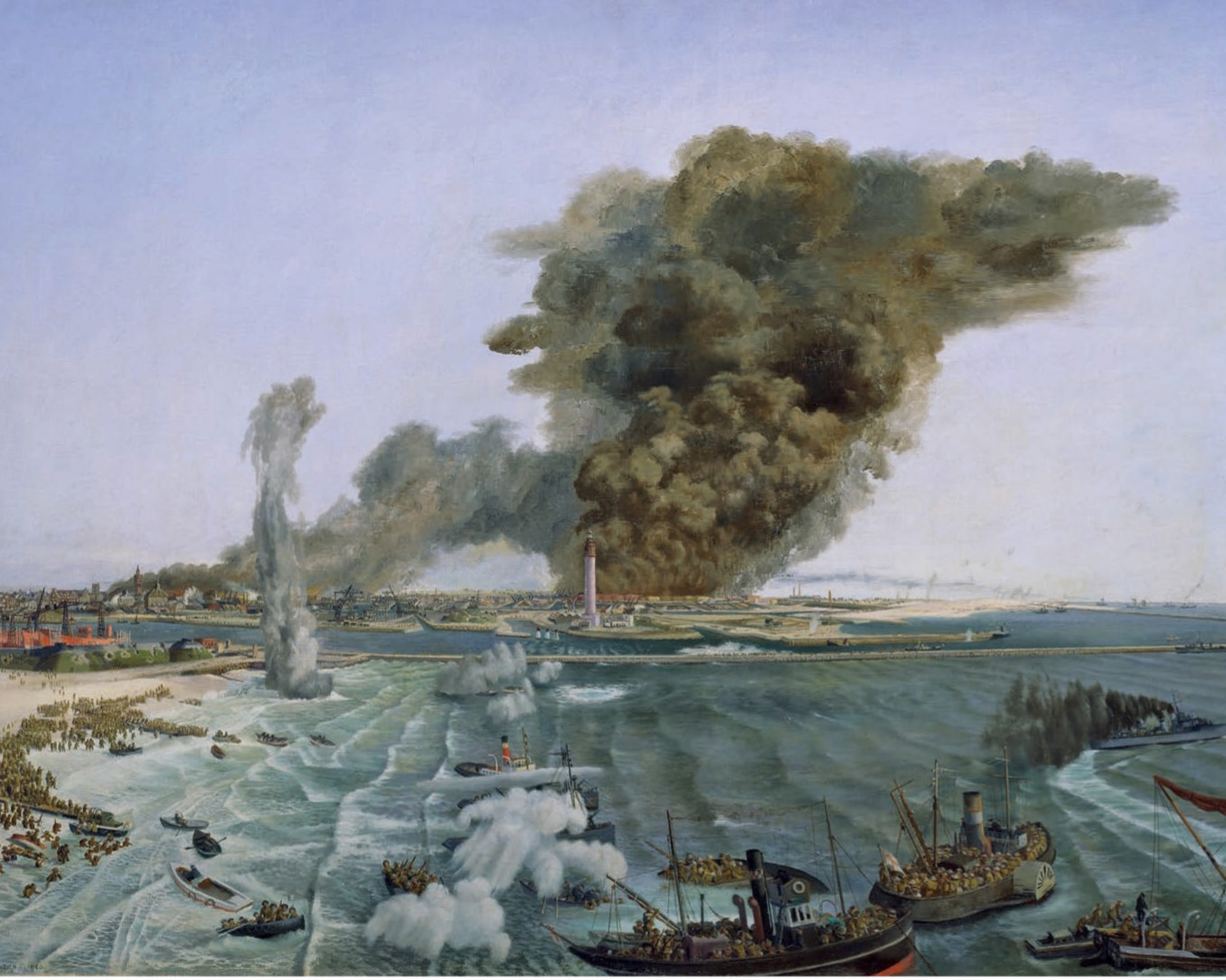

900 private boats set sail for France. Most were piloted by naval personnel, although some were captained by their owner.

The Admiralty estimated that they might bring 30,000 souls safely home. In the end, between 27 May and 4 June, the Royal Navy and the civilian 'Little Ships' would rescue more than 198,000 British troops and 140,000 French and Belgian. An estimated 235 boats were lost, yet many of the survivors of Operations Dynamo, Cycle and Aerial are still afloat, feted, cherished. Bearing the Little Ships plaque, each has its own story. You can view, visit, even sail aboard several, but this year we have a chance to see an unprecedented number at one time.

> "She's only worth the price of a second-hand car, and smells and creaks like an old wardrobe, but the message that she holds is priceless"

Apart from 1975 and 2020, every five years since 1965 the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships (ADLS) has organised a return to Dunkirk from the Kent port town of Ramsgate, 'heart of the Little Ships' – and the 85th anniversary crossing will be the largest yet. The boats will start to arrive on 17-18 May, to moor in Britain's only Royal Harbour, in preparation for departure on 21 May, amid much razzmatazz, with escorts from the Royal Navy and Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI).

Though she can't make the crossing, the *Medway Queen*, 'heroine of Dunkirk', will be towed to Ramsgate from Gillingham where she is open to the public. Built in 1924 for tranquil excursions on the Thames

MEDWAY QUEEN
£150,000

Previous page: Veteran Little Ship *Hilfranor* leaving Ramsgate Harbour for Dunkirk

Clockwise from top left: Withdrawal from Dunkirk, June 1940, on display at the Queen's House in Greenwich; Royal Temple Yacht Club; Ramsgate's promenade; Little Ship *Medway Queen*

PHOTOS: © NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM GREENWICH, LONDON; STEVE VIDLER/NADIA ISAKOVA/AWL IMAGES; PAUL MARTIN NEWS/ALAMY

and Medway estuaries, this splendid paddle steamer was to find herself minesweeping in the Channel; she made seven runs to Dunkirk, saving 7,000 lives.

If the *Medway Queen* is one of the larger Little Ships, *Firefly*, a 26ft motor yacht, is one of the tiniest. Such small boats were able to access the beaches to ferry troops to ships waiting offshore. In 1995, one Dunkirk veteran recalled being picked up by *Firefly* after two days on the beach without food or water, and delivered to the destroyer HMS *Anthony* for safe passage to Dover.

Owners Mark and Penny Webb look after *Firefly* for the nation and pass her story on. "She's only worth the price of a second-hand car, and smells and creaks like an old wardrobe," says Mark, "but the message that she holds is priceless." Aged 102, she is fragile, and the crossing is daunting, but the Webbs would not miss the Dunkirk run. "It's a pilgrimage, something we ought to do, so we get ourselves up for it."

If you watch Christopher Nolan's epic 2017 movie *Dunkirk*, you will see the 41ft motor yacht *Hilfranor*, piloted by her owner, ADLS Honorary Secretary Simon Palmer, who is making his fourth Dunkirk run. A beauty, with oak frames and mahogany with teak decking, *Hilfranor* was sunk in the war, re-floated, and resumed service to her country. Simon writes: "The story goes that she was straddled by bombs from German Stuka dive bombers. With her frames cracked, she settled into the shallow waters off the coast of France and was abandoned."

A group of desperate French soldiers bailed *Hilfranor* out, got her engines going, and made it as far as the treacherous Goodwin Sands, where she was spotted, foundering, by a British minesweeper and towed into Ramsgate. Like many of these iconic vessels she's somewhat a ship of Theseus: extensively refitted, but still with ▶

her ship's bell, Admiralty compass, and Dunkirk in her DNA.

"Now that few veterans are still alive – and this will be the first crossing without any – the boats have become the tangible evidence of the event," Simon reflects. "We represent the memory of those brave soldiers.

"Early on the day, all the boats start their engines and begin to move out of the harbour, the noise fills the basin, and it's very stirring. Then, on arrival, the flotilla is welcomed by the folk of Dunkirk. Ceremonies take place, the ADLS put on a service of remembrance and a bugler plays the *Last Post*."

"We'll have a siren warning, the foghorn, a trumpeter, and 73 ships with their horns," says ADLS Commodore Kevin Finn of the departure. "All the boats will be in the inner harbour, which has never been done before."

Brown Owl, 42ft motor yacht, is the fourth Little Ship that Kevin has restored, and he clearly sees himself more as custodian than owner. "People know about the Little Ships, and everywhere we go, they're treated like heroes. My job is to make her ready for the next 25 years before I pass her on."

The Royal Temple Yacht Club, overlooking the harbour, is the official supporting club for the 2025 return. "We're very proud and will do everything we can to support it," says Club Commodore Karen Cox. "The harbour will be packed. It'll be a beautiful spectacle, the boats all decked with flags."

Just moments from the seafront, you'll find the largest network of civilian wartime tunnels, a 'town beneath the town', built to provide shelter for 60,000 during air raids. "The Ramsgate Tunnels will be heavily involved in the commemoration," Karen tells me. "They have all the information about the town in wartime, and the story, not just of how the ships went over to Dunkirk, but about what happened when they came back."

Karen's husband Chris will be co-piloting *Brown Owl* with Kevin, but Karen has other plans. "I've decided against it in case it's rough, so I'll go in my friend's speedboat – a great big motor cruiser." Even in peacetime, an eight-hour Channel crossing in a small boat must indeed be challenging, but the guardians of these historic vessels will not be deterred: the Dunkirk spirit lives on. May they have fair winds and following seas...

Above: Hilfranor returning from her annual pilgrimage to Dunkirk
Below: A scene from the 2017 film _Dunkirk_

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These pages, left to right: **A scene from the venue's 2022 production of Puccini's opera *La Bohème*; Glyndebourne summer festival attendees enjoy a lingering interval**

PHOTOS: © RICHARD HUBERT SMITH; GRAHAM CARLOW

When the curtain rises on Glyndebourne's first ever production of Richard Wagner's final work *Parsifal* this summer, it will reveal a cast of nearly 200 world-class performers in a magnificent, purpose-built opera house deep in the rolling hills of East Sussex. Revellers in spangly gowns and black-tie finery will sip champagne and picnic on immaculate lawns during the sprawling, 90-minute intervals almost as famous as the performances themselves.

Glyndebourne's summer festival, globally renowned for its excellence, is a far cry from the festival's modest origins: an amateur entertainment dreamed up by an opera-lover and his muse on their honeymoon.

There has been a house at Glynde Bourne (as it was often spelled) since the 15th century. The present house's appearance is mainly from the 1870s, when its Victorian owner William Langham Christie added an extension with bay windows and fancy brickwork to conceal the building's 17th-century facade.

Glyndebourne's most famous alteration, however, was made by Langham Christie's grandson John, who came into legal possession in 1920. An obsessive music-lover, John added a magnificent organ room (usually open for audience members to enjoy) containing one of the largest non-cathedral organs in England. Alas, today this fabulous instrument is a beautiful shell, thanks to John's generosity after the Second World War when he donated various internal workings to chapels and churches whose organs had been badly damaged in the Blitz.

That room is where it all began. John Christie held regular amateur musical evenings there, soon supplemented with professional musicians. One such evening in 1931, John met soprano Audrey Mildmay ▶

Hitting the HIGH NOTES

The summer festival at Glyndebourne is a stalwart of the social season, where glamorous revellers attired in black tie picnic on the lawns before enjoying a spectacular night at the opera

WORDS **SANDRA LAWRENCE**

These pages, clockwise from bottom left: **The enchanting country house and auditorium are set within 12 acres of gardens; audiences regularly arrive two hours in advance for champagne and canapés in the sun-soaked grounds; opened in 1994, the auditorium holds 1,250 opera fans**

and fell instantly in love. They married a few short months later. On their honeymoon, the two opera fanatics visited festivals at Salzburg and Bayreuth and began to wonder how they might create a similar event in England.

They started on 28 May 1934, with a small-scale production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. Audience reaction was so positive that they soon outgrew their first, modest theatre. Remodelling again and again, the venue's capacity rose from 300 to 850. Still audiences clamoured for more. The current, horseshoe-shaped auditorium, seating 1,250 people, opened in 1994.

Glyndebourne's famous summer season runs for 15 weeks between May and August, presenting more than 70 performances of operas including, this year, that new production of *Parsifal*, plus revivals of Handel's *Saul*, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Verdi's *Falstaff* and Janáček's *Káťa Kabanová*. Naturally, the festival would not be complete without also including *The Marriage of Figaro*, the festival's most-loved (and -performed) opera.

There are few events for which an audience routinely turns up two hours before curtain up, but in Glyndebourne's case it's not just common but expected. Those planning to picnic hasten to claim their favourite spot, spreading out blankets and tablecloths. Some go as far as to bring tables and hampers; a few even produce candelabras and the odd butler. Those who cannot wait tuck into their starters; others stroll through the grounds.

Glyndebourne's gardens are immaculately cared for by a team led by Head Gardener Kevin Martin. Their 12 acres range vastly in style, from the dramatic sunken Bourne Garden, filled with exotic plants reflecting the glamour and spectacle inside the opera house, to wildflower meadows surrounding the orchard. Tall yew hedges surround the formal Figaro Garden, whose reflective pool showcases Henry Moore's *Draped Reclining Woman* sculpture spectacularly. The Urn Garden is also formal, filled with scented flowers that on a warm summer's evening can become quite heady with perfume, while the area around the Mildmay restaurant is fragrant and blowsy with cottage-garden favourites. The Lady Christie Rose Garden is a particular highlight, especially in June, though perhaps a little more conventional than the groundbreaking Dye Garden, producing plants that can be processed on-site to colour costumes.

With such a lead-up, it might seem easy to forget what the audience has actually come for, but the general, excited buzz as people slowly make their way to the auditorium is a reminder that Glyndebourne is justly famous for the quality of its operatic fare.

The curtain falls on the first act. Time to return to that carefully placed rug and basket of goodies. Many people bring (or pre-order) a picnic, ranging from a few sandwiches to the full candelabra-and-butler frenzy, but there are several on-site restaurants offering everything from light snacks to fine dining. The British climate ▶

Picnickers hasten to claim their favourite spot. Some go as far as to bring tables and hampers; a few even produce candelabras and the odd butler

PHOTOS: © GRAHAM CARLOW; JAMES BELLORINI; SAM STEPHENSON

PHOTOS: © ALBUM/LIFE'S LIKE THAT/ALAMY/NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/JOHN HAMMOND/JAMES DOBSON/ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL

***Top to bottom:* The 1981 Sir Peter Hall staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be revived this autumn; Glyndebourne hampers are gourmet affairs**

being what it is, large, covered balconies surround the opera house in case of inclemency, or there are undercover picnic tables that can be pre-booked. The smart dress code doesn't change, however bad the weather (as I discovered to my embarrassment on one particularly stormy occasion).

Glyndebourne's autumn season is a lot more relaxed, and a lot less famous, than the summer season. Many people experience the theatre for the first time through these more informal productions which, alongside equally high-quality, full-scale operas – this year including revivals of Puccini's *La Bohème*, Sir Peter Hall's classic 1981 staging of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a new adaptation of Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children* – reach out to new audiences and new performers. Aiming to nurture and develop the stars of tomorrow, these productions showcase new artists on the very cusp of international careers, providing audiences with a great opportunity to say, 'I saw them first, way back...'.

PHOTOS: © TRISTRAM KENTON; GRAHAM CARLOW

Away from the intensity of summer, Glyndebourne is also able to concentrate on growing audiences, including family open days, archive exhibitions, member events and an extensive touring schedule. Young people are particularly welcome; some performances are entirely dedicated to schools, introducing hundreds of children to the thrill of live opera.

Concert performances of Handel's *Messiah*, and the ever-popular Glyndebourne Christmas concerts provide seasonal joy, while open days (visit *glyndebourne.com* for dates) allow visitors to roam the famous gardens and exhibitions, and visit the shop and restaurants.

John and Audrey Christie would surely have approved of the year-round enjoyment their creation still gives. After all, John famously insisted on doing "not the best we can do, but the best that can be done anywhere". B

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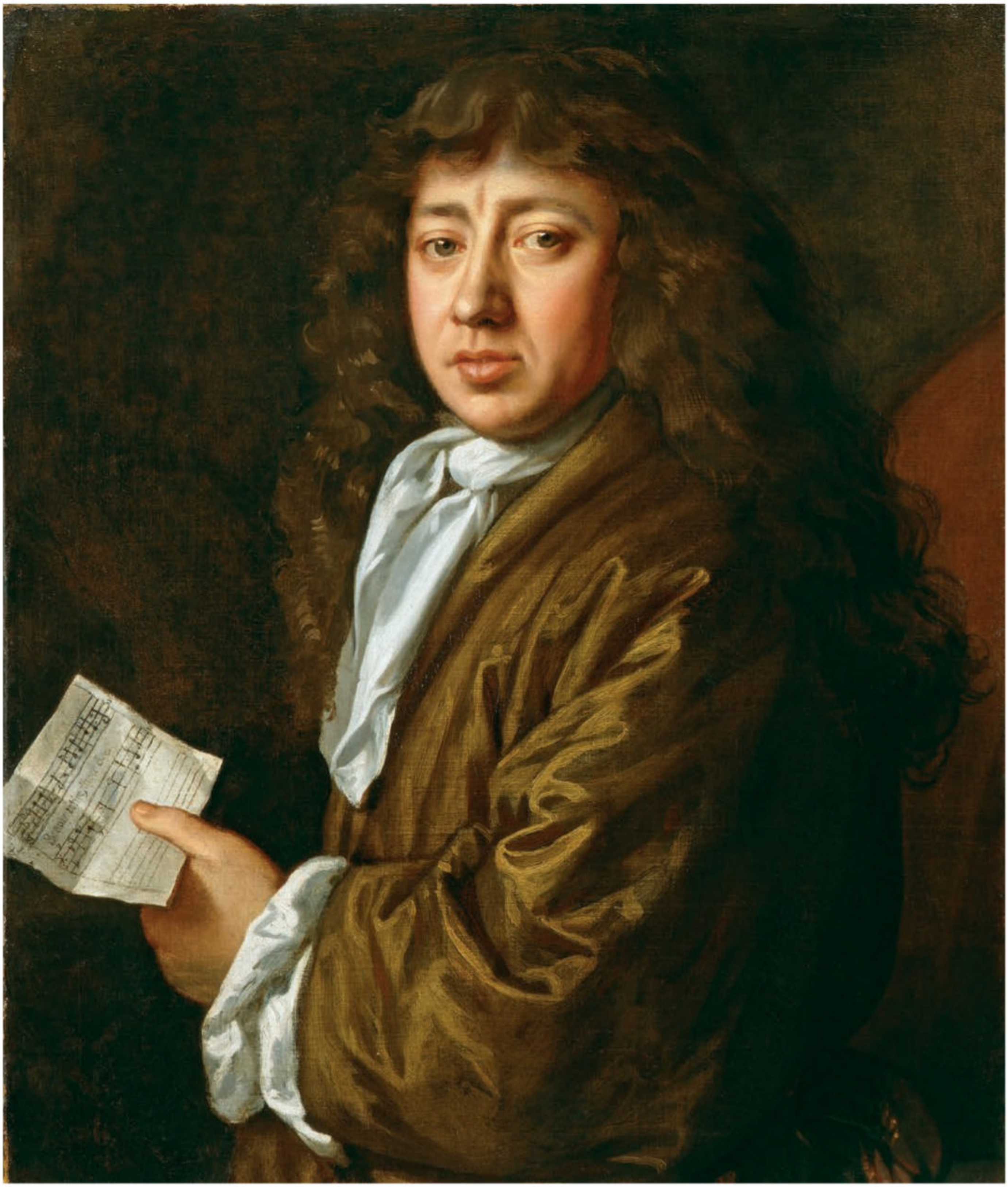
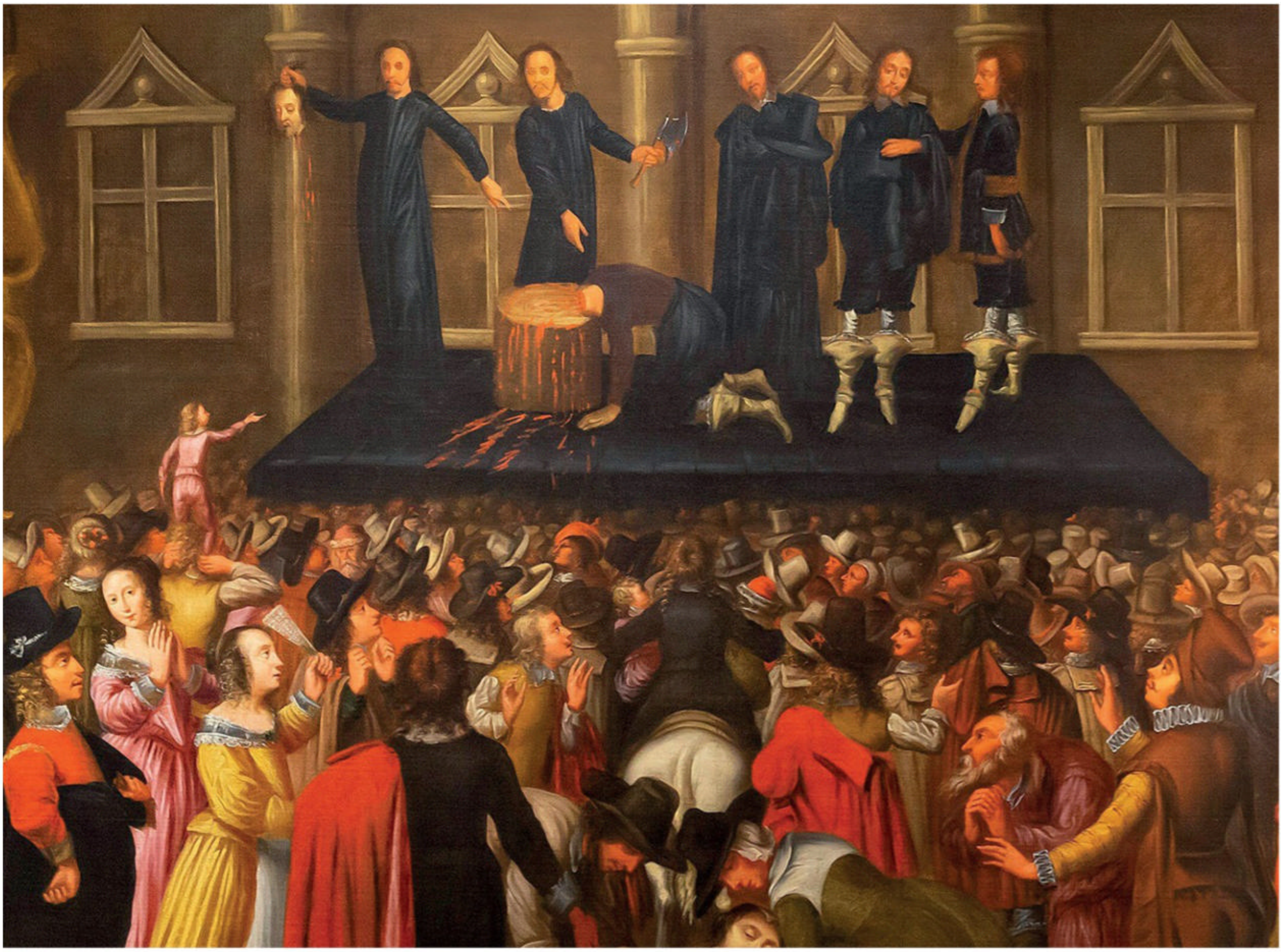


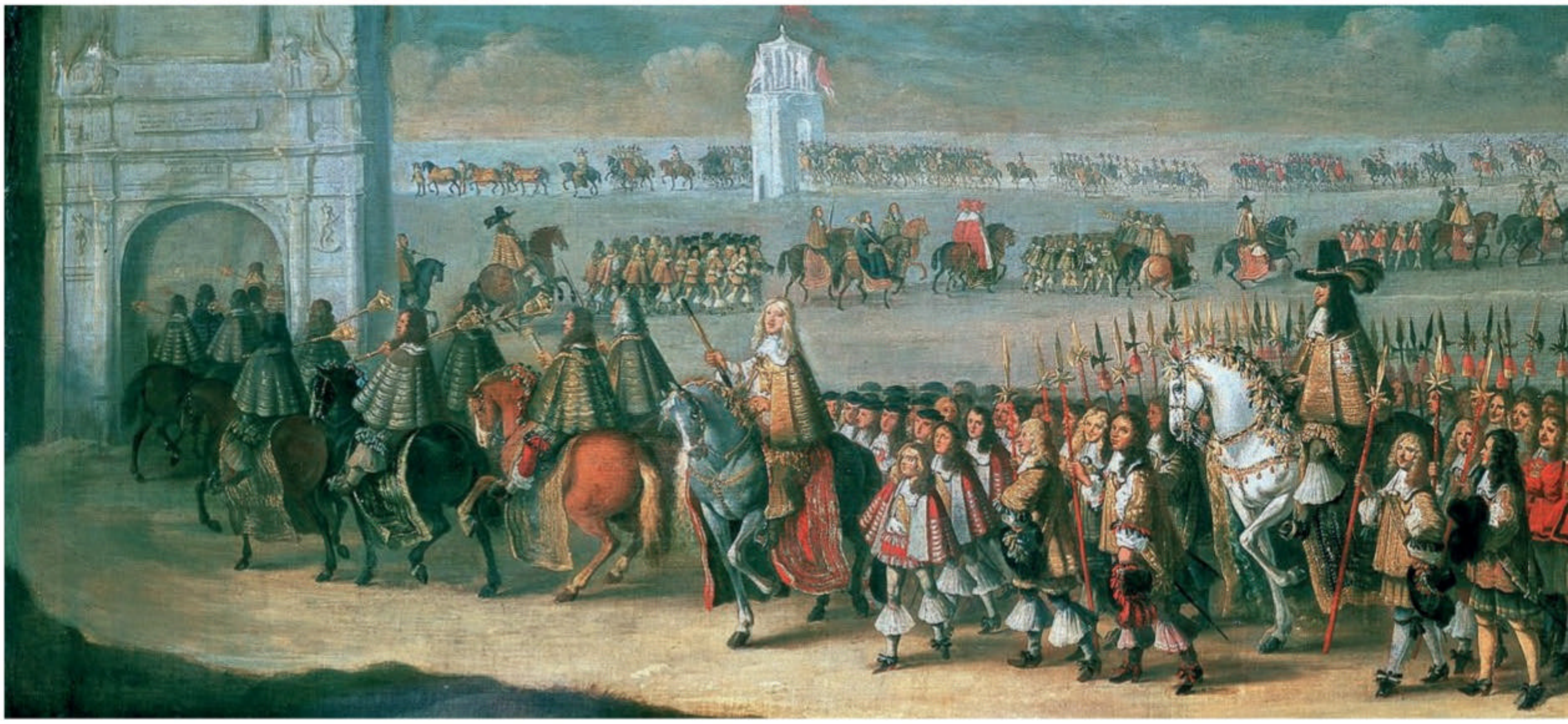
PHOTO: © *SAMUEL PEPYS* C.1666 BY JOHN HAYLS/NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

DEAR DIARY...

In his famous diaries, published 200 years ago, Samuel Pepys chronicled many of the key events of the 17th century, giving us a valuable insight into a tumultuous time in London's history

WORDS **CATHERINE JONES**





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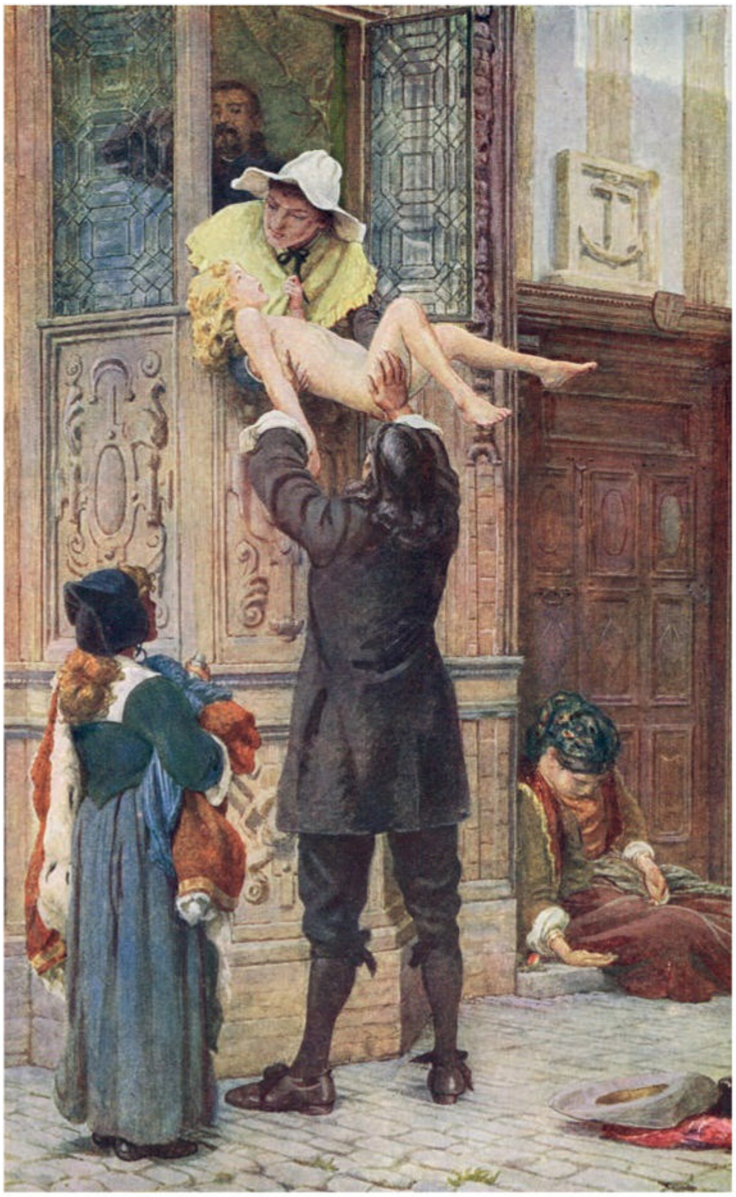
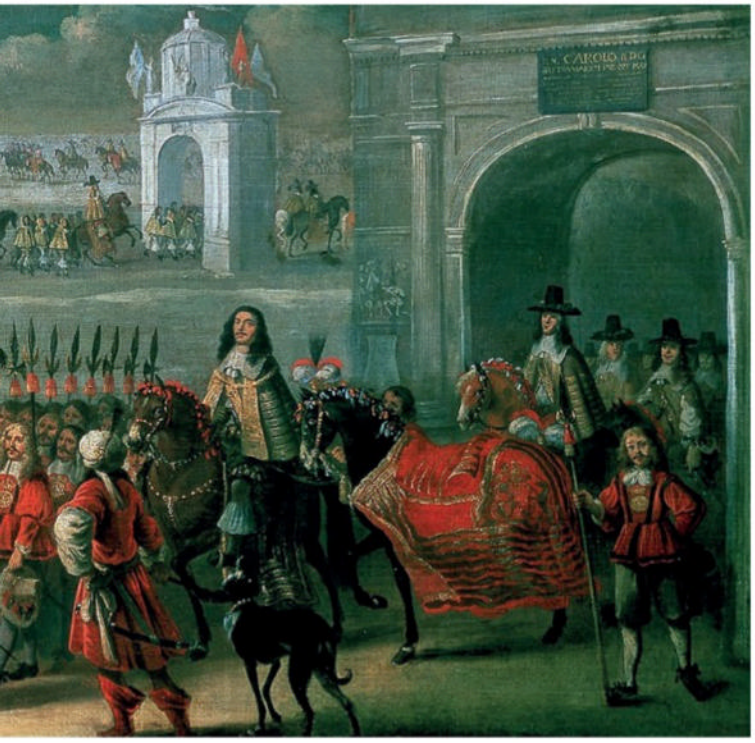




He may be one of history's most famous diarists, but Samuel Pepys never intended his private musings to be made public. When the naval administrator and politician died, the journals he had written assiduously over the course of a decade – the tumultuous 1660s – were presented to his alma mater, Magdalene College, Cambridge, with the rest of his books, manuscripts and letters.

But in June 1825, the volumes in shorthand having been 'deciphered' by the Rev John Smith, the *Memoirs of Samuel Pepys Esq FRS, Secretary to the Admiralty in the Reigns of Charles II and James II* were published.

Two hundred years on, Pepys' candid, sharp and often amusing observations remain one of the most famous diaries of all time, offering a vivid window into the 17th century.

It was a time when, in Pepys' words, "the world turned upside down". There was bloody civil war and a (mostly) bloodless Glorious Revolution, plague, fire and great scientific discoveries. Pepys not only lived through all this, he also often had a ringside seat.

Born just off Fleet Street in 1633, the son of a tailor with gentrified connections, and baptised at old St Bride's Church, Pepys was nine when the English Civil War erupted.

Although he spent much of his adult life in the service of the crown, his early political leanings were Republican, and in January 1649 a teenage Samuel was among the crowd outside London's Banqueting House to witness the execution of Charles I.

It was only later, and on the advice of his cousin Edward Montagu – a Parliamentarian subsequently made the First Earl of Sandwich for his role in the Restoration – that the young Pepys attached his colours to the royal mast.

So much so, in fact, that he was on the ship which carried Charles II home from his continental exile in May 1660. Pepys went ashore at Dover in a small boat with one of the merry monarch's beloved dogs which, he later wrote, fouled the craft "which made us laugh, and me think that a king and all that belong to him are but just as others are".

Then on St George's Day 1661 the inveterate diarist attended Charles' splendid coronation in Westminster Abbey. Despite enthusing over the "glory" of the colourful coronation procession, it seems the big day itself was rather trying. Having arrived in the early hours to bag a good seat, when the service finally started at 11am it proved so long Pepys had to leave before the end as, perhaps unsurprisingly, by then he was desperate for a toilet break! More happily, he later made his way round to Westminster Hall to witness the coronation feast and was gifted "four rabbits and a pullet" to share with some friends. ▶

Previous page: **A 1666 portrait of Samuel Pepys by artist John Hayls**
These pages, clockwise from far left: **A depiction of Charles I's execution, which Pepys attended; the diarist witnessed the full horror of the 1665 plague outbreak; Pepys was present at Charles II's coronation**

It was a time when, in Pepys' words, "the world turned upside down". He not only lived through it all, but often had a ringside seat

If the 1640s and 50s had been tumultuous, there was little let up with the Restoration. In 1665 plague struck London, claiming the lives of 70-100,000 people, including Pepys' friends, and his butcher, his baker, and his physician.

But while others fled the city, Pepys continued to live, work and socialise there – although avoiding the plague was a constant preoccupation. On 3 September he noted: "Put on my coloured silk suit very fine, and my new periwigg, bought a good while since but durst not wear because the plague was in Westminster when I bought it; and it is a wonder what will be the fashion after the plague is done, as to periwiggs, for nobody will dare to buy any haire, for fear of the infection, that it has been cut off the heads of people dead of the plague."

And 12 months later he was in the thick of it again when the great fire tore through the capital's streets. Pepys' maid Jane woke him in the early hours of 2 September, 1666, to alert him to what appeared to be smoke billowing on the horizon.

Later that morning, a dismayed Pepys made his way down to the Thames where he witnessed desperate householders flinging their possessions into the river in an effort to save them and even noted how "the poor pigeons…were loth to leave their houses but hovered about the windows and balconys till…some of them burned their wings, and fell down."

Heading straight on to Whitehall, he described the unfolding disaster to appalled courtiers, later recording: "So I was called for, and did tell the king and duke of Yorke what I saw, and that unless his majesty did command houses to be pulled down nothing could stop the fire."

Despite his suggestion being acted upon, high winds and tinder-dry conditions meant the Great Fire of London ended up ravaging more than 13,000 buildings (including Pepys' birthplace) and 87 churches, along with St Paul's Cathedral.

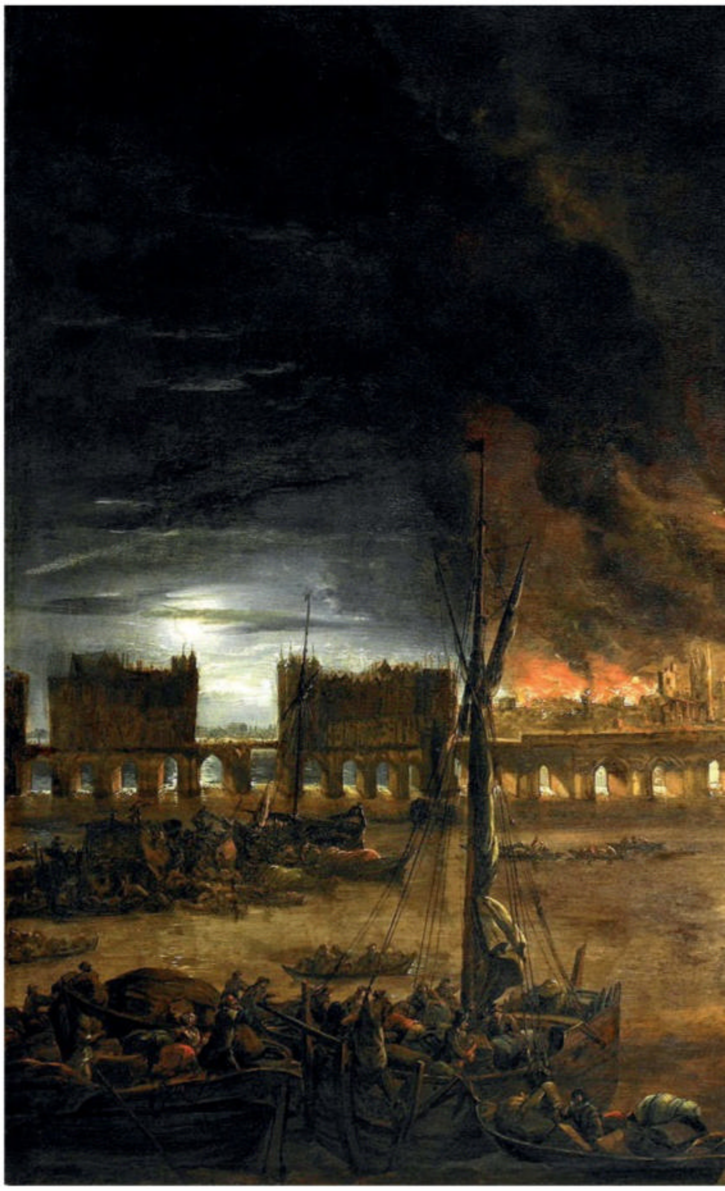
Pepys meanwhile took precautionary measures, sending his wife Elizabeth to Woolwich, the bulk of his possessions – including his diary – to Bethnal Green, and famously burying a treasured wheel of parmesan, along with wine and work papers, in the garden of his Seething Lane home. The house survived the fire, but the cheese's fate goes unrecorded.

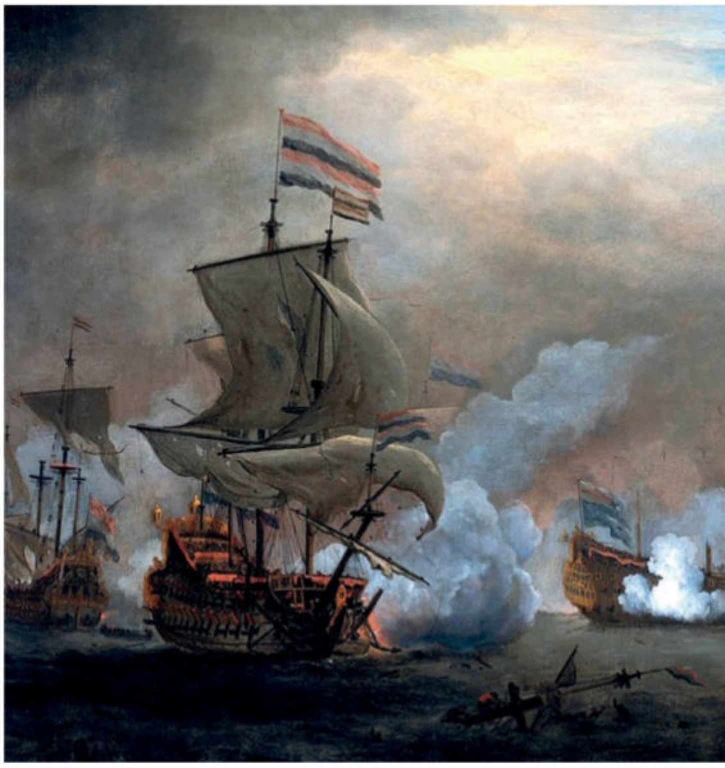
In 1669, fearing he may be going blind, Pepys stopped writing his diary. But he continued to lead a busy and eventful life. At the age of 40 he became both an MP and Secretary to the Admiralty, while in 1679 he was briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London, accused of passing intelligence to the French.

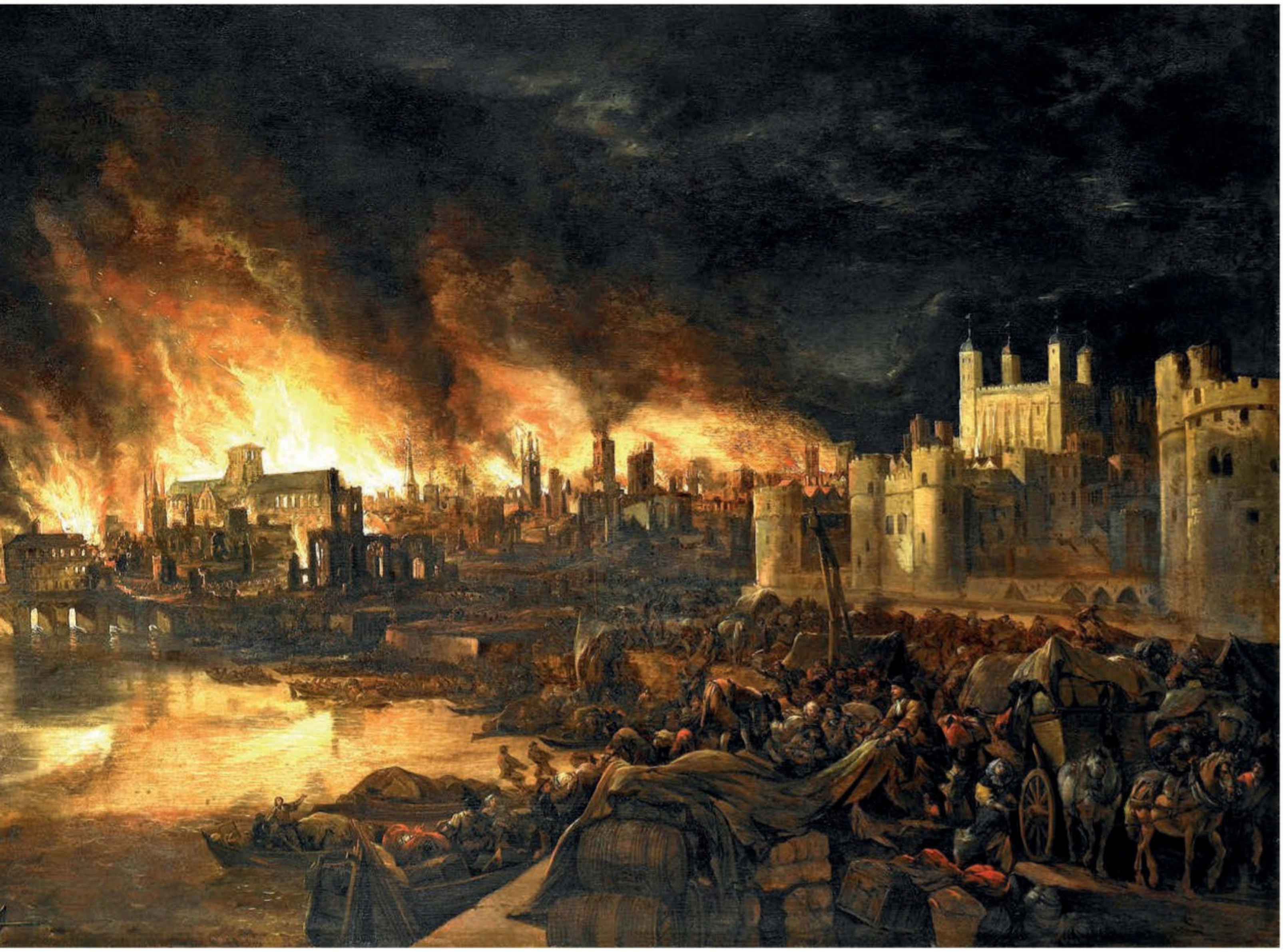
During the 1680s he served as President of the Royal Society – it was during his presidency that one of its most illustrious members, Isaac Newton, completed his groundbreaking *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, which expounded on the laws of motion and universal gravity.

Pepys died in Clapham, then a village outside London, in May 1703 at the age of 70. He was buried at St Olave's Church in Hart Street, just around the corner from his former Tower Hill home. His grave can still be visited there today: a lasting memorial to a life well lived.

Top to bottom: **Pepys' account of the Great Fire of London in 1666 includes his advice to the king; he also served as a naval administrator during the Anglo-Dutch Wars, depicted in this Willem van de Velde the Younger painting of the 1673 Battle of Kijkduin**







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PEN FRIENDS

While Samuel Pepys' reputation as a chronicler of his age is undisputed, another 17th century diarist was even more prolific but is relatively unknown. While Pepys' records only cover a decade, his contemporary and friend, the Royalist courtier, intellectual and horticulturalist John Evelyn, kept a diary for a staggering 64 years.

Evelyn had fingers in plenty of pies, and like Pepys he witnessed and chronicled many of the century's most momentous events. But he also offers a fascinating insight into everyday life throughout the 1600s.

Evelyn died in 1704, his diary published posthumously a few years before Pepys' own. Despite his impressive output, over the past two centuries Evelyn's diary has become overshadow by that of his illustrious friend, Samuel Pepys.

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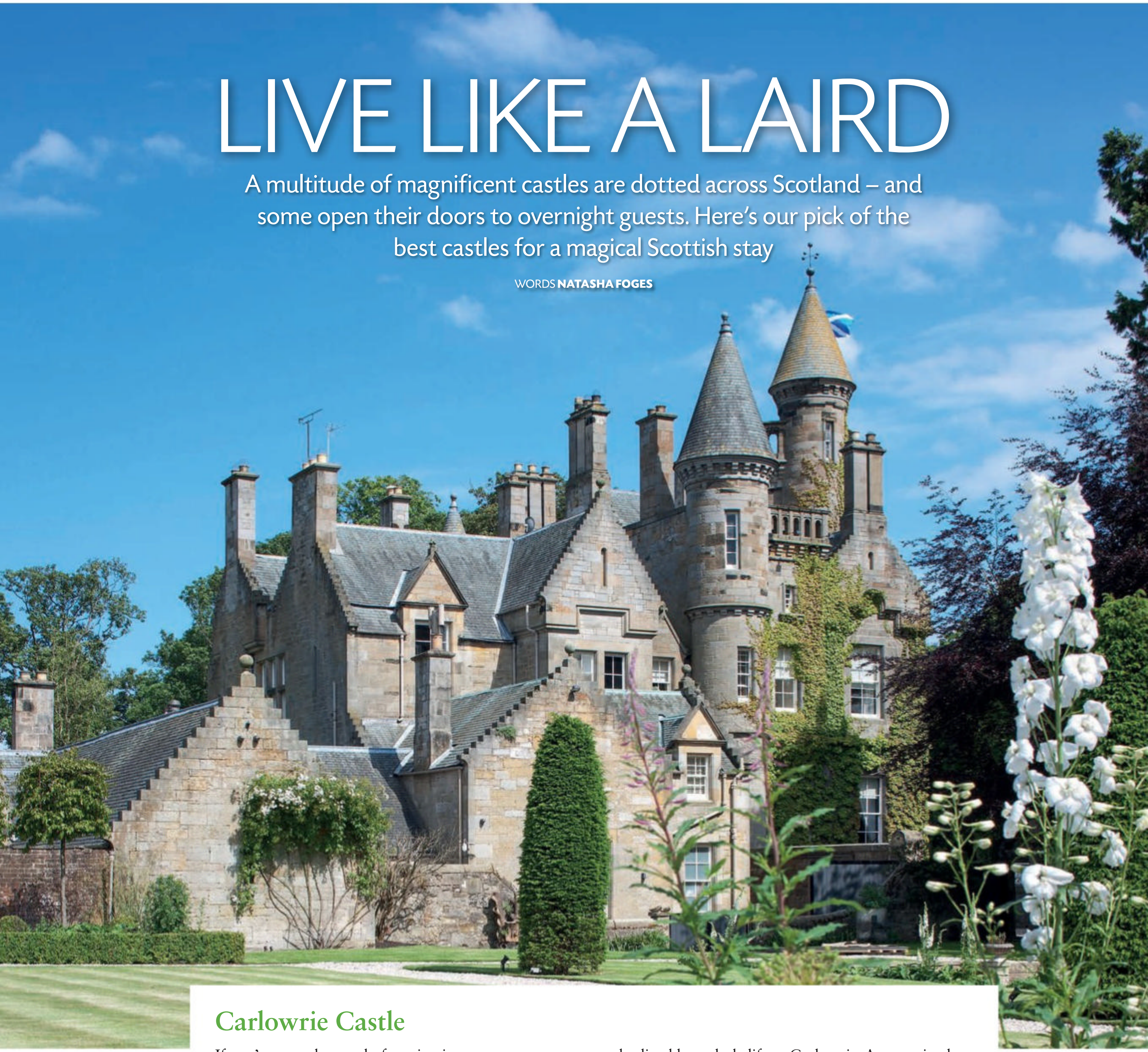


LIVE LIKE A LAIRD

A multitude of magnificent castles are dotted across Scotland – and some open their doors to overnight guests. Here's our pick of the best castles for a magical Scottish stay

WORDS **NATASHA FOGES**

PHOTO: © NEALE SMITH

Carlowrie Castle

If you've ever dreamed of staying in your very own castle, look no further. A Victorian castle built in 1852, Carlowrie is an exclusive-use venue, which can be hired in its entirety for a special event or for a large party of up to 40 guests. If you prefer your interiors more contemporary than tartan-clad, you'll enjoy Carlowrie's luxurious modern bedrooms, with sumptuous fabrics, handmade beds, outsize headboards and artworks by contemporary artists on the walls (and not a stag's head in sight). The prime suite is The Isobel, named after the botanist, Arctic explorer, writer and poet Isobel Wylie Hutchison, who lived her whole life at Carlowrie. Appropriately enough, The Isobel has its own private garden, where you can enjoy breakfast in idyllic seclusion.

Every room boasts beautiful views across the 32-acre castle estate, roamed by the estate's own herd of roe deer. Guests can wander through the grounds, playing tennis on the court within the walled garden, or croquet on the manicured lawn. Activities can be organised too, from picnicking in the paddocks to your very own Highland games – what better way to round off a stay in your own private castle? *carlowriecastle.co.uk*

▶

Thirlestane Castle

Historic home of the Dukes of Lauderdale, Thirlestane sits like a prize jewel in the midst of acres of lush green countryside in the Scottish Borders. One of Scotland's oldest castles, built in the 16th century, it has always been owned by the Maitland family, who came over from France with William the Conqueror in 1066. The family still occupy one wing, while the rest of the castle is maintained by a charitable trust.

There are five apartments in the South Wing, which can be booked individually or for exclusive use. Each apartment is wonderfully grand, furnished with pieces from the castle itself. The Maitland, for example, is set in the castle's old laundries (vintage Singer sewing machines are a nod to its origins), its walls adorned with grand oil paintings of Maitland ancestors. The Lauderdale, once the butler's quarters, has a bespoke bed extravagantly decked out in the family's tartan.

An array of experiences can be booked too – why not arrange for a piper to herald your arrival, or a chef to prepare a dinner to remember in the castle's magnificent portrait-lined Dining Room? Guests can also enjoy a tour of the state rooms, to see some of the finest decorative plasterwork ceilings in Europe, breathtaking in their ornate detailing, as well the room in which Bonnie Prince Charlie spent the night. *thirlestanecastle.co.uk*

Castle Fraser

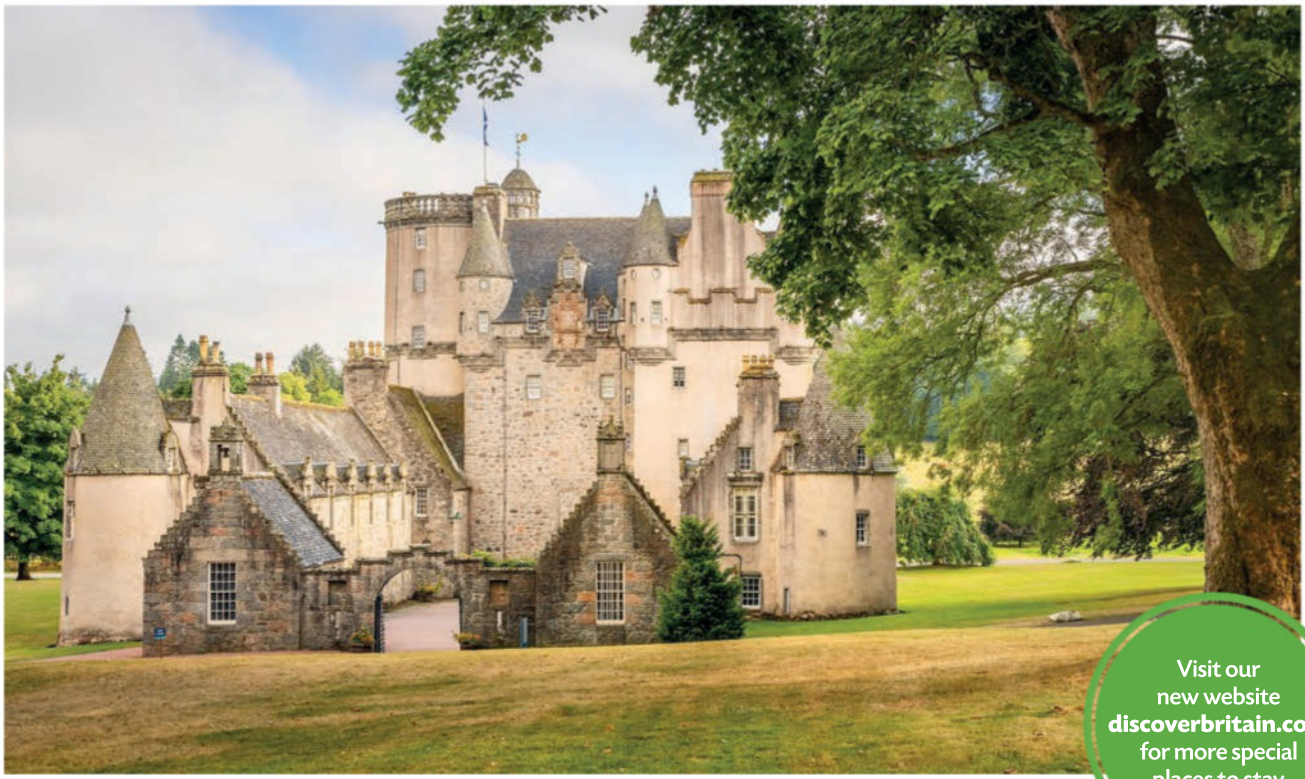
Grey-walled Castle Fraser in Aberdeenshire, near the charming village of Kemnay, is one of the largest tower houses in Scotland, dating from the 15th century. Cared for by the National Trust for Scotland, it's full of architectural quirks, including secret staircases, hidden trapdoors and a spy hole (as well as, reputedly, a number of ghosts).

The castle is open to the general public, but only a lucky few get to spend the night in this atmospheric place. A two-bedroom apartment tucked away in the East Wing, overlooking the spectacular grounds and castle courtyard, can be booked for a special self-catered stay. A spiral staircase leads to your apartment, comfortably but simply furnished – no suits of armour and wood panelling here, but plenty of cosy home comforts.

A tour of the castle itself during your stay is a must. Discover the colourful stories of the Fraser lairds as you climb the towers and visit the grand hall, dotted with family portraits, ornaments and mementoes.

The best part of a stay here? You're free to wander the grounds after the day's visitors have gone home, and see Castle Fraser's pale stone walls gleam against the moonlit night sky.

sykescottages.co.uk



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Stonefield Castle

Forever familiar from the song *Mull of Kintyre*, Paul McCartney's ode to this much-loved corner of Scotland (*Oh mist rolling in from the sea/My desire/Is always to be here/Oh Mull of Kintyre*), the Kintyre peninsula is not far from Glasgow, yet feels atmospherically remote. Standing high on the peninsula, on the shores of Loch Fyne, Stonefield has everything you might want in a Scottish castle hotel. Handsome baronial hall, roaring fires, brooding loch views? A cosy wood-panelled bar for whisky sampling, and freshly caught lobster and langoustine on the menu? Stonefield Castle has all of this and more.

Built in 1837, the castle was once home to the powerful Campbell family. The 60-acre estate that surrounds the hotel is celebrated for its plant species, particularly its important collection of rhododendrons, which bloom in pink and purple clouds in spring. These prized blooms were planted from seeds collected on a Himalayan expedition by the explorer Sir Joseph Hooker, a friend of the Campbells, in 1850. Make your way along winding paths to a causeway that leads to a small island – an excellent spot for fishing, or simply to sit and watch the boats on the deep blue loch, humming *Mull of Kintyre* on repeat.

stonefieldcastlehotel.co.uk ▶

PHOTOS: © PHIL WILKINSON; DAMIEN SHIELDS

Tulloch Castle

Built by Norsemen in the 12th century, Tulloch Castle is known as the historic birthplace of Clan Davidson. Grey-walled and ivy-clad with crenellated turrets, it's a picture of a romantic castle, and makes a good base for a Scottish Highlands road trip.

The castle still retains many of its original features, including its dungeon, and the 250-year-old Great Hall and grand fireplaces impart a sense of drama. The bedrooms feature a mix of wood panelling, four-poster beds and tartan fabrics, with far-reaching views over the leafy grounds.

There's plenty to do in the surrounding area, including a round at one of three championship golf courses, dolphin-spotting on the Moray Firth, or – if you've not yet had your fill – a castle tour, taking in other clan strongholds, such as the moated medieval Cawdor Castle. *bespokehotels.com*

PHOTO: © ANDREA JONES

Glenapp Castle

More country-house hotel than chilly castle, Glenapp in Ayrshire is a luxuriously grand and well-appointed escape. Sweeping views stretch from the fairytale turrets over manicured lawns and lush forests to the Irish Sea and the isles of Arran and Ailsa Craig. The public rooms are richly decorated with wood panelling, log fires and inviting sofas to sink into, while the 17 bedrooms are lavishly furnished, with swagged curtains, canopied beds and traditional antiques.

An air of refined ease prevails, but there's no stuffiness here: the staff are friendly and attentive to guests' needs, and have plentiful suggestions on how to spend your time, from shooting and fishing on the estate to more contemporary pursuits – anyone for forest bathing?

Or consider a Hebridean sea safari: travelling between islands, you can spot seabirds, go ashore to visit an ancient monastery or whisky distillery, or enjoy a five-star picnic on a remote beach.

Returning to Glenapp, you can enjoy dinner by candlelight in the elegant dining room or in the vine-clad Victorian glasshouse set in the castle's charming walled garden. Feast on west coast lobster, Isle of Bute smoked salmon and Orkney scallops, accompanied by vegetables and herbs from Glenapp's kitchen garden. B
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WORDS **ISOBEL KING**

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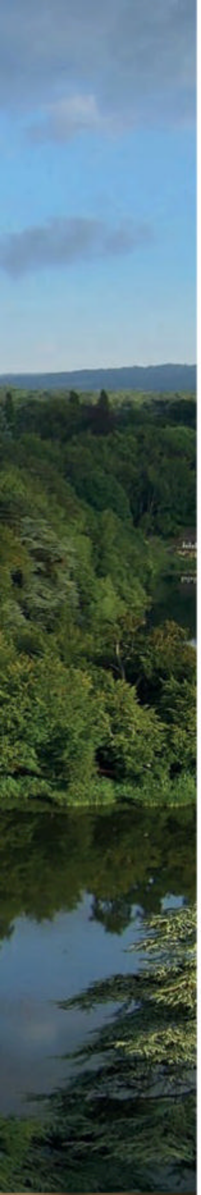
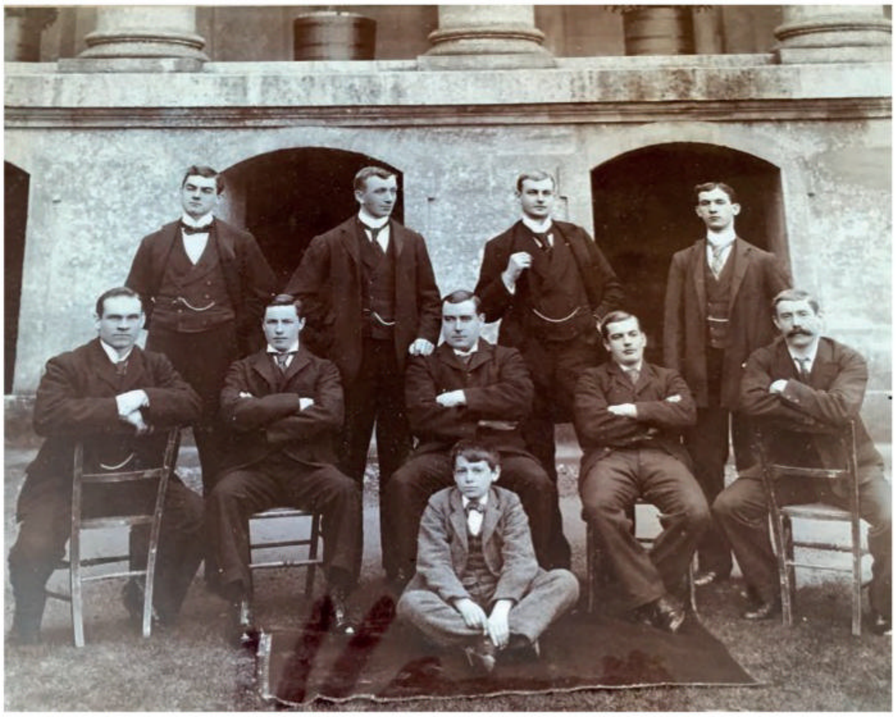




Blenheim's historic kitchens have been opened in a new permanent exhibition, shining a light on an up-till-now hidden world of servants and service

Legend has it that Blenheim Palace's staff could tell which service bell was ringing simply by its tone, without even needing to look at the room to which it corresponded. No mean feat considering the iconic bell system, still partially in use today, is made up of no less than 50 bells. Maids and footmen could even be roused from their sleep by the bells installed in their rooms, at their master's beck and call whatever the hour. Prerequisites of life as an employee here? Hard graft, dedication – and a good ear.

Designed by architect Sir John Vanbrugh (also of Castle Howard fame), Blenheim Palace was built in the early 18th century for John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, near the town of Woodstock in Oxfordshire. Churchill was awarded the money and land to build his flamboyant Baroque residence by Queen Anne, who was delighted by his victory over the French at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704. The Battle changed the course of European history and helped to stop France from winning control of Spain. At a final cost of £58m in today's money, and no end of bust-ups between Sarah, the first Duchess, and Vanbrugh, this "monument to victory" was eventually finished in 1733.

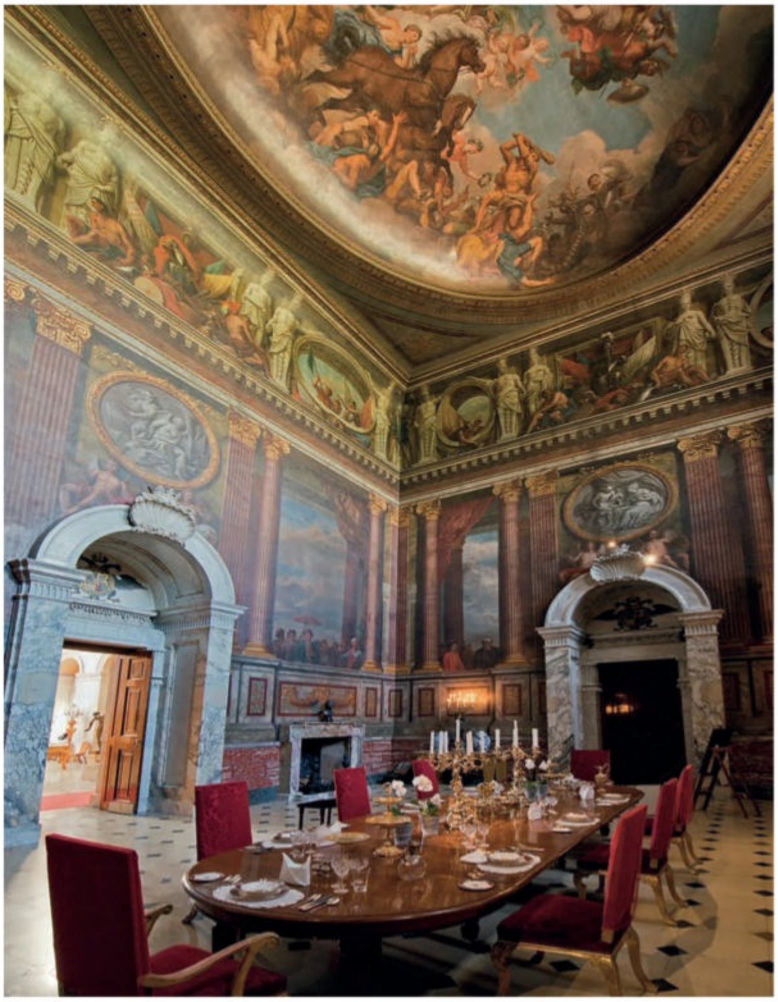
Blenheim is famous for being the only non-royal, non-episcopal country house in Britain bestowed with the title 'palace', as well as being the birthplace of great wartime leader, Sir Winston Churchill. Its history has tended to focus on aristocratic extravagances and characters, from the profligate 5th Duke of Marlborough known for his inability to pay his servants' wages, to the glittering parties of the 9th Duchess, Consuelo Vanderbilt. But this spring, for the first time, Blenheim's historic kitchen and wider undercroft have been opened in a new permanent exhibition, shining a light on an up-till-now hidden world of servants and service.

Rather than run-of-the-mill information boards, the experience is utterly immersive. Beginning in the delivery area where goods are checked as they come into the palace, we're thrown back in time, theatrically positioned as a new servant arriving to help the Blenheim Palace staff of the 1890s prepare for a royal visit. "That's the loose theme as you go around," says Emily Spencer, Head of Operations. "You get a sense that you're working with [the staff], rather than simply observing."

The then Prince of Wales (Queen Victoria's eldest son, godfather of the 10th Duke of Marlborough, and later Edward VII) did indeed visit in 1896. He'd clearly enjoyed himself there previously, this being his fourth trip. Other royal visitors included King George III in ▶

PHOTOS: © BLENHEIM PALACE

***Previous page:* Service bells downstairs correspond to specific rooms upstairs *Clockwise from top left:* Blenheim sits in a 2,000-acre estate; an archive photograph of liveried footmen in the palace's Great Court; summoned by bells, staff would carry trays up and down the narrow staircase**



The kitchen has been restored to all its Victorian glory, with beautiful cast iron ranges and gleaming, monogrammed copper pots

1786, who famously remarked of Blenheim's Triumphal Arch: "We have nothing to equal this." The swelling of the workforce for such occasions was typical. "Late 1800s, if there was a major function, they may have to bring in people from the surrounding villages... and from around the UK," Spencer explains.

For a royal occasion such as this, staff numbers "could have come up close to a hundred," estimates Kate Ballenger, Head of Collections. "Obviously with royal visits, they would have brought a lot of their own staff with them as well." Blenheim Archives' extensive records of those who lived and worked on the estate have been drawn upon to create pen portraits of actual members of staff, which inform the exhibition too.

The historic ale and wine cellars that follow are complete with original bottles and barrels, vital supplies for the household; as Jeri Bapasola tells us in her book *Household Matters: Domestic Service at Blenheim Palace*, over two years in the time of the 4th Duke, more money was spent on wine than on anything else, even coal.

The Victorian Marlboroughs were equally keen on quaffing champagne, port and sherry. Patient work has stripped away numerous layers of paint and plaster to get back to the cellars' original limestone walls, while a glass partition at one end looks through onto the personal wine collection of Jamie Blandford, 12th Duke of Marlborough, who currently calls Blenheim home.

The beating heart of the undercroft was the kitchen, where the head chef served up rich meaty pies made with game shot on the estate, as well as fresh produce grown in the walled garden. The kitchen has been restored to all its Victorian glory, with beautiful cast-iron ranges and a large work table, the space

▶

PHOTOS: © BLENHEIM PALACE

Clockwise from above: **The State Dining Room, with its exquisite paintings by Louis Laguerre; the head chef's realm, full of cookware fit for preparing a feast; authentic details in the servants' quarters; the pantry has been returned to a bygone era; the kitchen was the beating heart of the servants' quarters**

BREAD
FLOUR
FLOUR
FARINE
SUCRE
CAFE

bedecked with gleaming, monogrammed copper pots. "We've uncovered as much as we could of the ceiling to show the old vaulting," says Ballenger, "and we're bringing in lots of items from the family collection." A soundscape adds atmosphere, too, the head chef barking orders over general hubbub and a crackling fire.

It's incredible how hard staff worked for such momentous occasions. The original narrow spiral staircase, which laden platters would have been carried up to be served, can be seen – and it's safe to say they were heavy. In the scullery, where there are piles of pungent carbolic soap, this is vividly brought to life. "Our conservation assistant had the brilliant idea of creating a display with dishes to show the actual weight that the maid had to carry up and down the stairs," says Carmen Alvarez, Deputy Collections Manager. It was backbreaking work.

Elsewhere, the Butler's Pantry is realistically stocked with candles, herbs and other commonly used items of the time, while in the Mess Hall, where those service bells hang, we're a fly on the wall listening to a soundscape of servants' grumbles and junior staff being admonished by their seniors. The entire visitor route couldn't be more authentic, based on the undercroft's actual floor plan of 1866.

If social position was of vital importance upstairs, it was no different below, with a clear hierarchy of servants. Everybody 'knew their place'. Upper servants included the butler, housekeeper and valet while the lower servants were made up of under butlers, footmen and maids. Such distinctions confounded the 9th Duchess of Marlborough, Consuelo: "It was only later that I found... that I mustn't expect even a servant who stood high in the hierarchy to perform a task he considered beneath his dignity," she relates in her memoir *Glitter and the Gold*. "On ringing the bell one day I was answered by the butler, but when I asked him to set a match to an already prepared fire he... observed 'I will send the footman, Your Grace,' to which I hastily replied, 'Oh, don't trouble, I will do it myself.'"

"It's not about what's going on in the dining room, even if it is a visit by the Prince and Princess of Wales," says Alvarez. "It's about how the team worked and prepared for that event, and the stress that was below the stairs." The labours so vividly brought to life here serve as a reality check, and more. It's a celebration all of its own, putting those who worked so honestly and tirelessly firmly in the spotlight. B

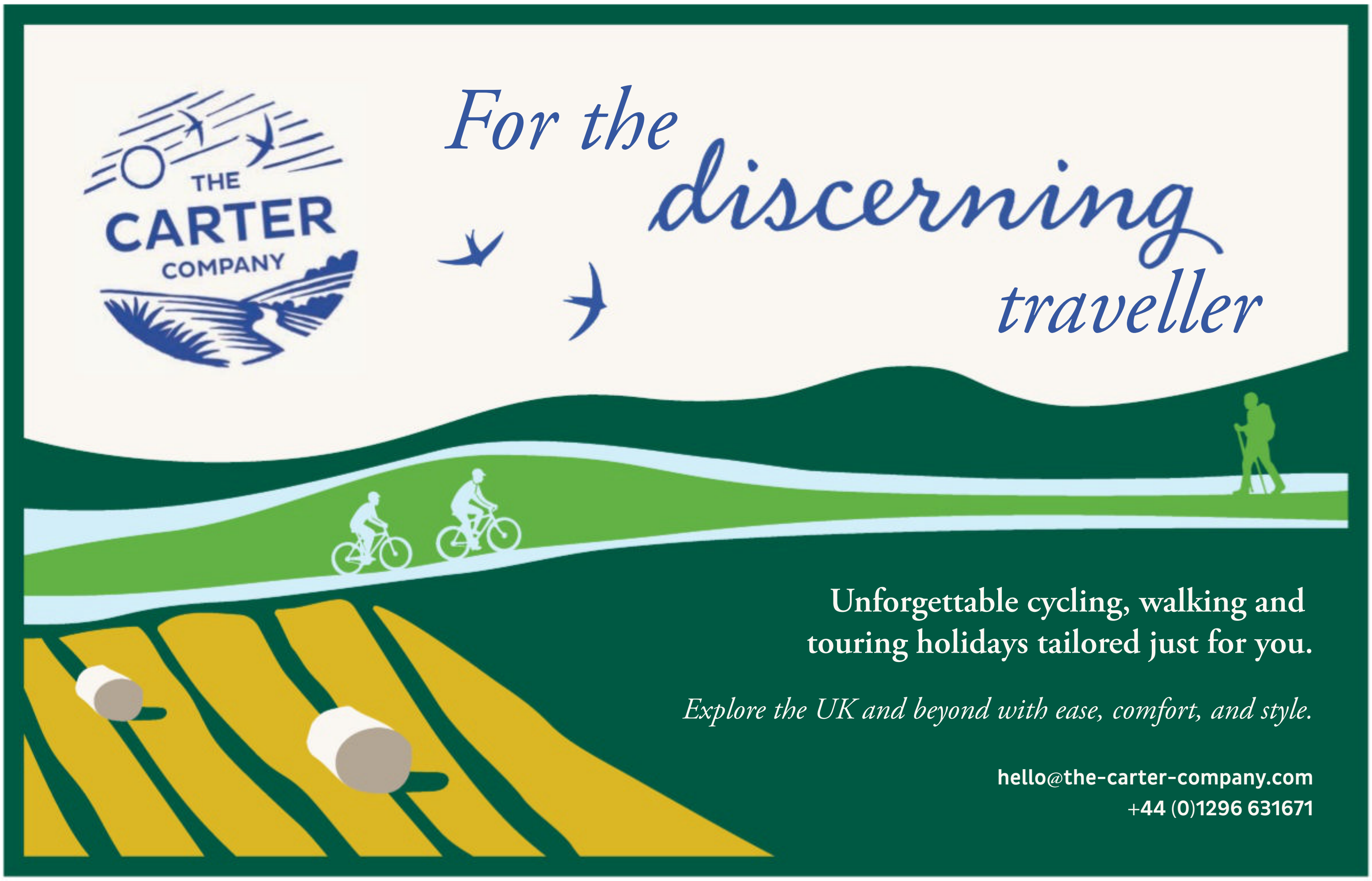
RAISING THE ROOF

Entrance to *Life Below Stairs* is free with a valid Blenheim Pass or day ticket. blenheimpalace.com

Life Below Stairs isn't the only exciting new addition to Blenheim Palace this spring. While works are ongoing to restore Blenheim's roof, which hasn't seen any attention since the 1950s, there's an opportunity to survey the estate and wider Oxfordshire environs from above the palace itself. From May onwards, those of us with a head for heights can ascend the building for this once-in-a-lifetime view, taking in highlights such as Blenheim's Column of Victory and the ancient oaks which form part of the Capability Brown landscape.

And that's not all. For a limited time from spring onwards, some of the grandest rooms that comprise the current Duke of Marlborough's private apartments will be unlocked. Walk the new route taking in never-seen-before spaces such as the Smoking Room, where Stubbs's celebrated portrait of a tigress hangs, to the stunning Grand Cabinet. Decorated with a hand-knotted Savonnerie carpet, this room is also home to the finest collection of family portraits the palace has to offer.

PHOTOS: © BLENHEIM PALACE



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ILKLEY

The well-heeled former Yorkshire spa town conceals dramatic stories at its heart

WORDS **JENNY ROWE-PATEL**

Clockwise from top left: **Sunset at the Pancake Stone on Ilkley Moor; White Wells spa cottage; a visit to Bettys to sample a 'fat rascal' scone is essential; stroll along Ilkley's high street, The Grove, to take in the jolly mix of independent stores and pop-ups**

There's something about a striking natural landmark that can really add atmosphere to a place. For the Victorian spa town of Ilkley, the towering moor does that in spades. It's a landscape that's captured the imaginations of locals and visitors alike for centuries, as the famous Yorkshire folk song *On Ilkla Moor Baht'at* attests. Thought to have originated in the second half of the 19th century and often claimed to be the county's 'unofficial national anthem', the song tells the story of a man courting a woman named Mary Jane who makes the apparently fatal error of forgetting to wear his hat.

The song goes on to describe – to a quite unnecessary level of gruesome yet bizarre detail – how, as a result of his cold head, worms will eat his body, ducks will eat the worms and the singers will eat the ducks. Make of that what you will, but the bleak omen of Ilkley Moor is palpable as soon as you set foot in Ilkley.

The most well-known geological formation on the moor is fortunately within easy reach of the road. You can't miss it. Also known as Hangingstone Rocks, the Cow and Calf Rocks are made up of a large sandstone outcrop and boulder. Legend has it that the Calf split from the Cow when the giant Rombald – in panicked flight from his angry wife – stamped on the rock as he leapt across the valley. In response, his wife dropped the stones held in her skirt to form the other well-known local rock formation, the Skirtful of Stones cairn. In the summer months, you can watch the brave – and not so brave – rock climbers scale these formidable rock faces. You can guess which are the most entertaining…

PHOTOS: © JW PHOTOGRAPHY/ANDY AUGHEY/ALAMY; VISIT ILKLEY; HEIDI MARFITT

CELEBRATION CAKES
Bettys

Booksellers
Fig & Willow
Ilkley

Another very short walk from the road along a well-worn route is the spa cottage of White Wells. In 1859, Charles Darwin was among the most esteemed visitors to have trodden this path in order to 'take the waters'. Today a plunge pool still exists, alongside a cafe (it's open if the flag is flying). If you fancy a dip, you only need to enquire with the cafe staff.

Another remnant of Ilkley's therapeutic past is back down the valley in town. First opened in 1935 as part of King George V's Silver Jubilee celebrations and once considered one of the largest heated outdoor pools in England, Ilkley Lido narrowly avoided closure in 2024. Today, it's one of just over 100 lidos in the country.

To turn back the clock several more centuries, visit Ilkley Manor House, near the Riverside Gardens and River Wharfe itself, which is often full of paddling families on a hot summer's day. Next door to the All Saints' Parish Church (also worth a peek), this Grade I-listed house stands on the remains of a Roman fort and itself dates back to around 1390. With three clearly defined building periods, the house is a typical example of how English domestic houses developed between the Middle Ages and early modern period. Ilkley Manor opens its doors every weekend – for free – as an art gallery, museum and community hub, hosting a packed calendar of events throughout the year.

And of course, no trip to Ilkley is complete without a booking at Bettys for high tea. A Yorkshire institution, the brand has become synonymous with exquisite service, elegant interiors – and ample-sized 'fat rascals' (rustic Yorkshire fruit scones). Born out of the dreams of a young Swiss boy named Frederick Belmont, today Bettys offers a healthy mix of Victorian continental confectioner's sophistication and down-to-earth Yorkshire charm.

Back on the high street, you can't fail to be swept away by Ilkley's lively spirit. At weekends the bandstand is rarely empty of musicians, with almost every surrounding bench occupied by amused, munching bystanders.

Trim, colourful floral displays line the streets, which are packed with pop-ups, independent shops, cafés and delis. Hosting the Ilkley Food & Drink Festival every June (14-15 June 2025) in its riverside park, the town's pride in its high-end heritage just keeps on growing. ■

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

There are regular direct trains from London to Leeds (2hr 10min) and then a connection once an hour to Ilkley (30min). *lner.co.uk; northernrailway.co.uk*

WHERE TO STAY

Less than a 15-minute drive from Ilkley, you can't turn down the chance to stay at the luxury Devonshire Arms Hotel & Spa. Surrounded by the rolling Yorkshire Dales countryside, the Old Wing offers traditional, country estate-style rooms. In Ilkley itself, The Crescent Inn offers four-star accommodation, a French bistro and a modern British pub, all in one grand Victorian building. The best part? You're right at the centre of the action, just around the corner from the station – and Bettys. *devonshirehotels.co.uk; bistrotpierre.co.uk/rooms/the-crescent*

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Located on the site of Ben Rhydding Hydro, the country's first hydropathic hotel, and on the edge of Ilkley Moor itself, the Cow & Calf pub serves proper British grub alongside sweeping Wharfdale views. You're ideally placed for a moorland wander afterwards. For a light bite to eat in town, try New Brook Street Deli or Thirty Nine – both family run and bursting with tasty eat-in or take-out options. *vintageinn.co.uk/restaurants/yorkshire/thecowandcalfilkley; 39thegrove.co.uk*

FURTHER INFORMATION

discoverilkley.co.uk

See our website **discoverbritain.com** for more on beautiful Yorkshire

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A day with...

ALAN KENNETT

The Second World War veteran, who turns 100 this May, gives us a snapshot of his military career and shares his memories on the 80th anniversary of VE Day

How old were you when you went off to war?
I was 18 when I volunteered to join the RAF, having previously been in the ATC [Air Transport Command]. This was against my father's hopes, who was keen for me follow in his footsteps; at the time he was serving in the Royal Corps of Signals.

What position did you hold, and where were you posted?
I was sent to RAF Penarth in south Wales to take the 'King's shilling' as a volunteer and begin my training. From Penarth, I was transferred to the recruit training centre at North Shore, Blackpool, where training consisted of drills and PT on the beachfront at Blackpool in the winter months in my shorts!

I then began my Flight Mechanic Engineer course, which provided the squadron with the ability to service any type of piston-engine aircraft. In July 1943, I was posted up to York with my first squadron – Mustang Squadron of the Army Co-op.

What was the buildup to D-Day like?
I was part of the second tactical Airforce and moved on from York to an airfield near Ashford. We knew there was a buildup to an invasion of sorts, but we just got on with day-to-day duties. However, the conditions weren't very comfortable, and we lived under canvas with eight men to a tent, with no sheets and no pillows – just a ground sheet.

We had to waterproof all the vehicles ready for our crossing to France, and finally on 22 June we sailed to the Isle of Wight, where we waited for the rest of the convoy. In the early hours of 23 June we were on our way to France, and none of us knew what awaited us when we landed.

I then moved through Normandy and was up to Antwerp by September 1944. Then, I moved on to an airstrip near Schwarzburg, before beginning the crossing of the Rhine, where the airfield Group Commanding Officer was Johnny Johnson (Battle of Britain pilot).

> "We were on our way to France, and none of us knew what awaited us when we landed"

What were you were doing when the end of the war was announced?
By May 1945, I was in Celle near Belsen. I remember being in the station cinema on the evening of 4 May, when the doors were burst open by Johnny Johnson driving his jeep into them. Initially annoyed by the disruption, the cinema soon erupted with joy as Johnny shouted, "The war is over!" A big party soon followed, filled with lots of drinking and celebration at the news.

What did you do after the war?
I married my sweetheart Rita in October 1945 and was demobbed in December 1946. I was married for 62 years and had two children, three grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Do you have plans for 8 May this year?
I'd like to be able not only to meet with my family but to meet up with those who went through the same experiences, especially those I went to Normandy with in June 2024.

What does the 80th anniversary of VE Day mean to you?
The 80th anniversary brings back so many memories of that time. After the news, we hoped that meant we'd be going home as we were concerned we'd be sent to the far east. Of course, we also thought about those who wouldn't be going home, and I suppose we were grateful that we had survived.

It wasn't a celebration for everyone. The war was still being fought in the far east and even in Europe. Our squadron was involved in the last kill of the war in Europe, taking part in action early on the morning of 8 May.

It's important that it's remembered, those of us who went to war and especially those who didn't come back, risked their lives for the freedom of not just Europe but everywhere. Everyone should be reminded of the sacrifices they made.

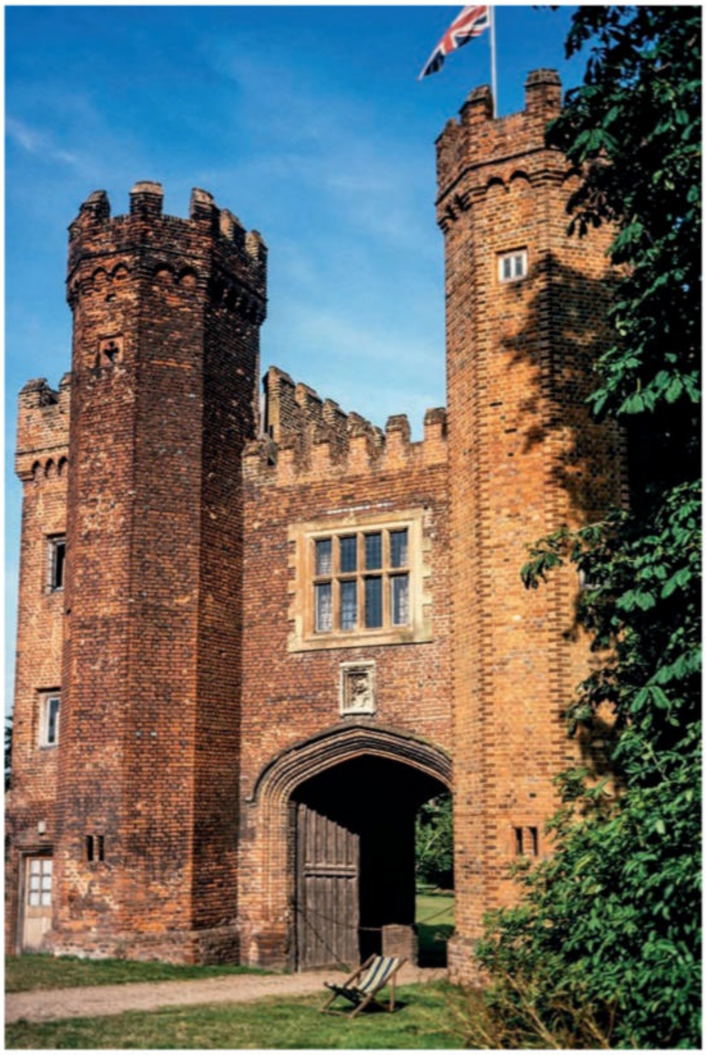
The Royal British Legion is proudly marking the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day and supports veterans and their families to ensure that the service and sacrifice of the Second World War generation is always remembered. Visit britishlegion.org.uk for details on upcoming events.

STORIES FROM HOME

Lullingstone Castle

A terrifying ordeal in the Colombian jungle led to the creation of Lullingstone's World Garden

WORDS **ELEANOR DOUGHTY**



Tom Hart Dyke, 49, has always known that one day he would inherit Lullingstone Castle near Dartford, Kent, the lovely red-brick house with medieval gatehouse that has been in his family since 1361. There was no sit-down moment when he was told his destiny. Instead, that knowledge has been "subliminally, telepathically there," he says. "Nothing has ever been said – the bond is so strong with my parents that they knew I'd be up for it."

Figuring out how to manage Lullingstone in the modern world came to him in almost unimaginable circumstances. In March 2000, while on a plant-hunting expedition on the Darién Gap, on the Panama-Columbia border, with his friend Paul Winder, Tom was taken prisoner by guerrilla fighters, and held for nine months. Three months into their captivity, the fighters said, "'you've got five hours before we blow your heads off.' I opened my diary, and with the red biro they gave me started scribbling a plan for what turned into the World Garden." The thought of this – a garden laid out in the shape of a world map, populated with rare plants from around the globe – and the "botanical escapism" it offered, saved his life.

> The thought of a garden laid out in the shape of a world map, populated with rare plants from around the globe, saved his life

After the pair returned home to the UK, Hart Dyke told his parents Guy and Sarah about his plan. His father dismissed it as a bad idea, given that Lullingstone sits in a particularly cold valley, but Hart Dyke was undeterred. In March 2005, the garden opened for the first time. "Every time I walk through it I breathe in the Kentish air particles and think, 'isn't life great?'" He can make light of his experience now, but "at the time we genuinely thought we were going to be executed, and it was horrible."

As well as saving Hart Dyke's life, the World Garden has transformed Lullingstone; last year, it received 60 coach-loads of visitors, three-quarters of whom came to see the gardens alone. It's clear, he says, that were it not for the World Garden, the house would be "in a poorer place – there would be waterfalls coming down the staircase. But that's not why I [drew up the plans], when I was in Colombia – it was a personal thing derived from my love of plants. I thought I was going to be shot. The way it's worked out is bonkers."

The World Garden requires work, of course, but the house commands specialist attention – particularly, currently, on the roof. This is, Hart Dyke laments, thanks to "generations of it not being done. Lots of things have been done, but the roof, the most expensive thing, hasn't." His challenge now is to raise money via various means – including grant applications – to shore this up, and get the house onto a solid footing.

Hart Dyke's optimism is infectious. While some custodians of big houses feel the weight of their burden, "with imaginary lead weights on their shoulders," he shrugs these off. "I just love the place. Of course, it's a responsibility, but I don't take it for granted one bit."

lullingstonecastle.co.uk

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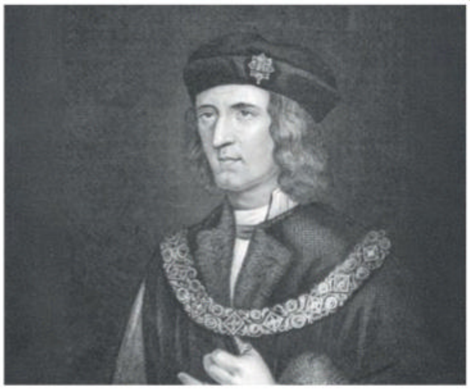

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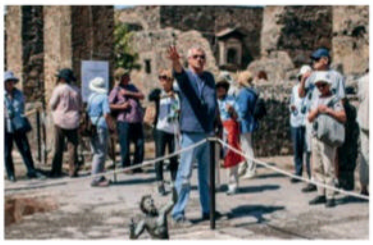

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